

CHANDAMAMA

Celebrating 60 Wonderful Years

COLLECTOR'S EDITION



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Showcasing the
Best of Chandamama
in the last 60 years ...

This Collection features some of
the most memorable stories to
have featured within the pages
of Chandamama.

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The Founders: Shri Chakrapani's vision coupled with Shri B. Nagi Reddi's mission to do something for the growing generation of independent India led them to start a magazine for children.

Foreword



B. Viswanatha Reddi
Editor/Publisher

W henever I recollect the beginnings of *Chandamama*, I feel I am reading a fairy tale, as colourful as its content is.

It was early 1947. I suppose the young idealist that my father, Shri B. Nagi Reddi, was he could muster enough courage to translate his long-cherished dream into action. It was his friend Shri Chakrapani's vision, coupled with his own mission, to give a creative turn to their concern for the growing generation of free, independent India that led them to plan a magazine for children.

Chandamama was really an adventure to reckon with. The very concept of *Chandamama* was unique in that it was designed to be a magazine carrying short stories that reflect the spirit of India. These stories would aim to inspire the children to enjoy in the right way. Perhaps the two young volunteers of the freedom movement could feel the agony and pain of Mother India's heart and soul, for her children having been deprived of the essential touch and feel of our heritage and culture. They were inspired to take upon themselves the noble endeavour of taking India's hoary past closer to children through the medium of pleasant narratives.

With a printing press at his disposal and a friend, a multi-linguist and a talented writer who could wield the pen with power and ease, Shri Reddi was already publishing a socio-political periodical, *Andhra Jyothi*, in Telugu. The two now decided to branch off into publishing for children, launching an illustrated magazine characterised by stories.

The printing press had only the bare minimum machinery and infrastructure. The first issue, mostly with two colour illustrations on 64 pages and priced 6 annas (37 paise) came out in June 1947. It was printed by letterpress with copper blocks for four colours and zinc blocks for two colours. The initial print run was 6,000 copies, mostly dispatched to towns that had post offices, as specimen copies to identify prospective distributors among dynamic, enterprising ▶

The initial print run was 6,000 copies, mostly dispatched to towns that had post offices, as specimen copies to identify prospective distributors among dynamic, enterprising youngsters who could promote the magazine.

youngsters who could promote it. I remember some of the senior members of Father's staff recalling the struggle he went through in building up a network and distributing the magazine far and wide. The warm response he received from educationists and others who mattered from all over the country no doubt gave him a morale boost.

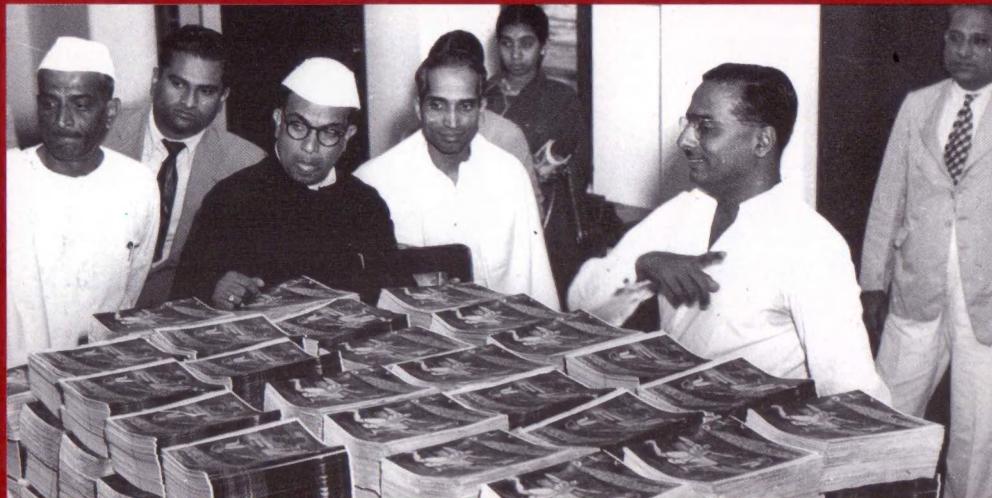
It is my firm conviction that any project with a noble cause will prove blessed. Perhaps that was the faith that helped my father and Shri Chakrapani to build up a team of committed writers and illustrators to supplement and complement each other's efforts to make *Chandamama* a vibrant voice of India's heritage.

Shri Chakrapani was the Controlling Editor of *Chandamama*. He was ably assisted by writers like Raja Rao, Mudda Viswanatham, Bhairagi, Dasari Subrahmanyam, and K. Kutumba Rao. Their main task was to retell stories from Indian mythology and the folklore prevailing in different regions of the country.

Right from the early days, the illustrations that accompanied the stories added a new dimension to the magazine's character.

They came from the brush of T. Veera Raghavan who signed as Chitra, M. Gokhale, Kesava Rao, K.C. Sivasankaran (Sankar). Vaddadi Papaiah (Vapa) and MTV Acharya were past masters in drawing illustrations for

the cover pages. Their artworks have even today retained the brilliance of the colours they used.



Starting with two largely spoken languages in 1947 in the then Madras Presidency - Telugu and Tamil - *Chandamama* went on adding six languages in the next four years. Being a writer of repute in Telugu, Shri Chakrapani took the liberty of using the simple spoken style in that language for the first time, to make the narration child-friendly. That attracted even the not-so-literates among the elders.

Thus *Chandamama* brought about a revolution in the use of language which, in turn, earned for it wider popularity. The same trend was followed in other languages also.

Stacks of manually bound copies



It took about six years for the publication to break even and earn a minimum margin, but its makers were in no hurry, because *Chandamama* for them was an exercise in their patriotic zeal and they were eager to reach out to children in more and more languages.

It was also their noble desire to reinvest whatever could be called profit to improve the quality, and untiringly they persisted in their mission, and to meet their missionary zeal, they went on expanding. Their ultimate goal was to bring out *Chandamama* in all the major spoken languages of India, to achieve national integration through a common forum.

I was told that Shri Nagi Reddi would personally supervise the printing of colour formes to make sure that their registration was perfect. In those days, colour formes were being printed in single colour machines, with tri-colour blocks. It was no mean achievement to print colour on newsprint, that too through no better equipment than the good old letterpress.

I vividly remember my first encounter with the editorial staff of *Chandamama*. I had just entered my teens when I felt a strange urge to write a story. It was not something original, the plot was based on a legend about Akbar and Shahjahan

that I read when I was a student of the Ramakrishna Mission High School. The story was in our Hindi Reader. I was nervous and shy when I walked into the Editorial Department. I met Shri Mudda Viswanatham, popularly known as Thathayya.

I gave the story to him. He read it then and there and gave me a nod, and I guessed that the story would then go to Shri Chakrapani for his approval. It took a couple of days for me to learn that my story had been accepted for publication. That was the beginning of my adventure as a writer. I must confess that my first story was published after thorough editing and re-writing.

At that point of time – the year was 1956 – I could never imagine that I would be heading this splendid institution in the next ten years. I must gratefully acknowledge the encouragement given to me by Shri Mudda Viswanatham and others in the Editorial team.

After nurturing the magazine for 11 years, and giving it a unique character, the founders thought of a change of guard with the younger generation playing a greater role. The publishing responsibility was transferred to Shri B. Venugopala Reddi in 1958. During his seven-year tenure, he was responsible for consolidating the growth and contemplating >



Shri Nagi Reddi and Shri Chakrapani with their team in 1952.

1947-2007:
60 wonderful years



The First Issue:

Priced at 6 annas, the first issue was a 2-colour magazine with a print run of 6,000

English Edition is launched



New Face in the Team:

Mr. B. Venugopala Reddi takes over as the Publisher.

1947

1955

1958

1965

1970

1977

X

faced acute paper shortage. Publishers could not get timely shipments. At one stage, *Chandamama* did not have enough paper to print the different editions for the next few months. Manufacturers in Canada, who were regularly supplying paper, sent no shipments. I was in a dilemma. For the first time, we had to look for Indian paper. A dear friend introduced me to someone associated with the Bhadravathi Paper Mills. I had no option other than driving down to Bhadravathi along with him to try and find some paper to avoid delay or a break in the magazine's publication. I could secure some quantity of paper, but the question was,

where do I go for the balance? Soon after I came back from Bhadravathi, I had a very casual meeting with a common friend at a family get-together. I was narrating my experiences and among my listeners was a fellow publisher who expressed his sympathies for me. I did not then know that he was a godsend guest. The next day I received from him enough paper to tide over the crisis. For me it was nothing short of a miracle.

There came a moment in my career of 40 years when we were forced to suspend the publication of *Chandamama*, in 1998. Unfortunately that was also the time when my father took to bed. Having given a word



New Editor takes over

Mr. B. Viswanatha Reddi, the current Publisher/Editor, takes over.

English Edition is revived

The English edition suspended in 1957, revived under Mr Robinson

First Children's Magazine with all pages in 4 colour

A cover to cover colour edition was created to mark the 30th year of publication

to him that the magazine would be revived. I was determined to keep my promise, though I was in a helpless state. Suddenly, yet another angel appeared on the horizon in the person of Shri Vinod Sethi. We could revive all the 12 editions. The first copies were taken to my father on December 1, 1999. It was his 87th birthday. He was on a wheelchair and was not in a position to hold the copy and read it, but he was happy. His satisfaction was, for me, a reward from the Divine.

I can only borrow an expression from him: "Many hues make a rainbow". I have travelled with Chandamama crossing all



Sanskrit edition is launched. Chandamama has the distinction of becoming the first magazine for children in Sanskrit.

Chandamama in Braille. Braille editions in four languages were brought out in the International Year of Disabled Persons.

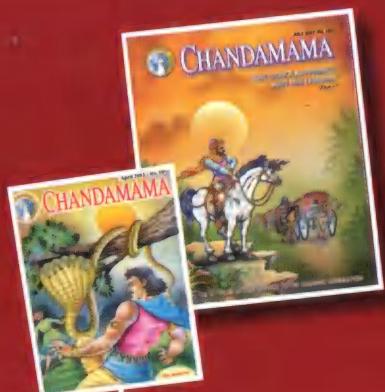
1978

1981

1982

hurdles, and I can only say it was all Divine Grace. If Shri Vinod Sethi had helped me in 1999 to keep my word, I am equally grateful to Shri Kiran Kulkarni and Shri Prashant Mulekar, of Geodesic, who have now come forward to take Chandamama to the next phase and help me realize my father's unfulfilled dreams.

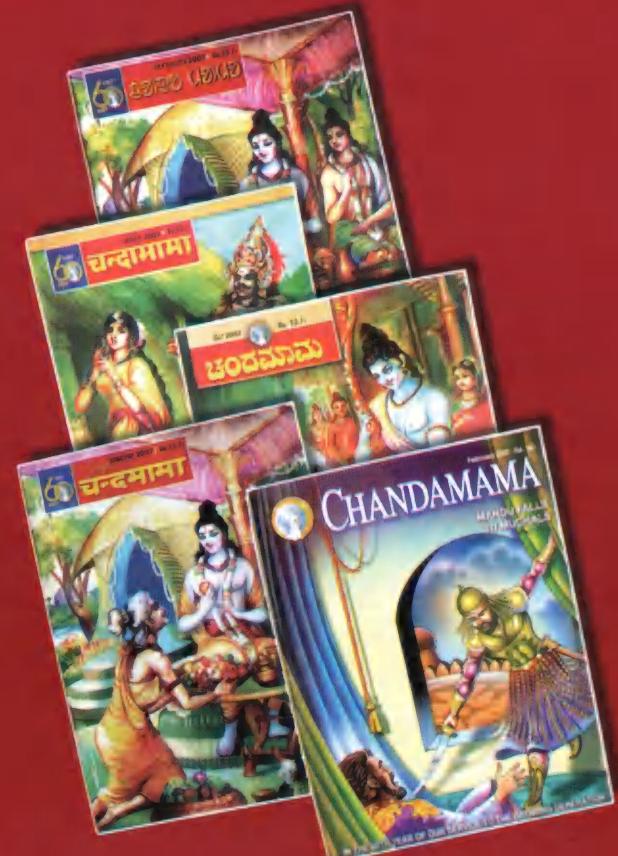
It is *Chandamama* that has kept my skills and spirits alive all these 40 odd years, and I shall ever remain beholden to *Chandamama*.



14 Language Editions
14 language editions being published regularly month after month.

Experiment in size
The English edition is delinked from the language editions and given a new layout and design.

2002



Bilingual Edition
English-Tamil edition for expats in Singapore and English-Tamil, Telugu, Hindi-Gujarati editions for expats in North America.

2003

60 wonderful years
Chandamama becomes the longest running children's magazine in India.

2007



Prof. Manu Das
Editorial Advisor

The Story So Far

For India, the fourth decade of the 20th century was a time at once beautiful and bizarre. The firmament of destiny over the country, as if, was marked by the smiles of a rainbow as well as the gloom of ominous clouds. People dreamed and despaired, hoped and feared at the same time.

India had achieved freedom, but at the grave cost of the partition of the sub-continent and continuous communal violence, massive and unprecedented, that preceded and followed the cherished event. The very psyche of the nation seemed sick – the young being most vulnerable to that foul air of suspicion and depression.

There were of course famous people preoccupied with plans for reconstructing the country economically, politically, educationally and industrially. But one man – not so famous then – and one of his friends, we do not know how and exactly where, brooded over the possibility of spraying some rejuvenating fragrance into the sickly environment. They felt keen to devise some means of uniting the children of the entire nation in their need for dreams and delight, swimming against the current of distrust and disunity.

The two were Shri B. Nagi Reddi and Shri Chakrapani. They proposed to provide the children speaking different languages with the same blend of joy and knowledge, but in pots of different colours, i.e. through their mother-tongues.

Thus was launched the phenomenon that is *Chandamama*, at first only in three but gradually emerging in more and more languages, reaching twelve, including English, Sanskrit, Braille and even the tribal language Santhali. Not that the publication did not venture into even more languages. If it momentarily retreated, it was not because there was anything wrong in its idealism or its acceptability by the young, but because the milieu as a whole was yet to be fully conducive to the endeavour.



CHANDAMAMA

చందమామా

వంరము

పందమామ

చందోబా

చందమామా

శంక్రాన్తమామా

టాండ్రమా

అంబులియామా

జిహ్వ మామ

చాందమామా

అందమామా

ప్రథమ ప్రథమ

A look at the treasure that is *Chandamama* extending over the past sixty years cannot but be a feast for the eye and cannot but cause a sense of amazement and admiration. It has projected the heritage of India through myths, legends, folklore, historical episodes and questions and answers; it has made the young laugh without being gross; it has stirred their imagination through fantasy; it has provoked their wit through enigmatic tales; it has alerted them to events and occasions that are significant; last but not the least, it has tenderly awakened in them a love for the motherland and humanity at the same time.

It has done all this while steering clear of several categories of bias that often dominate the air. Its impressive circulation asserts the truth that it is not indispensable to bow down to vulgarity for the sake of popularity. Obviously, it could not have been easy to sustain this inviolability and dignity with a plethora of sickening trends and styles all around it. It needed both conviction and courage – traits that made its founder Shri Nagi Reddi a legend, an object of love and adoration. Generations of readers saw in that many-splendoured personality (he was a Dada Saheb Phalke Award-recipient film-maker, founder of two major health-care institutions, among several other

establishments), a mentor over the budding phase of their life. The world does not lack in celebrities, but rarely had any of them a silent influence on the formative years in the lives of so many generations of readers. (I remember how, on the eve of his ascendancy to the position of the President of our Republic, Dr. A. P. J. Abdul Kalam visited the bed-ridden Shri Reddi at the latter's residence in a gesture of esteem for this wizard behind what is perhaps the world's most remarkable experiment in multi-lingual children's publication.)

I had no opportunity of personally knowing Shri Chakrapani. But I can visualise the discipline and skill he exemplified from the way Shri B. Viswanatha Reddi, affectionately called Viswam, the worthy son and inheritor of Shri Nagi Reddi's creative mantle, refers to him – his father's dear friend and fellow-traveller. However, I count knowing Shri Nagi Reddi personally among my most valued experiences. It is said that chance is the pseudonym of God, which he uses when He does not wish to put down His signature. It was sheer chance that one day led me to Viswam in the year 1973. His spontaneous trust in me and my love for *Chandamama* drew me closer to the institution before long. The English edition of *Chandamama*, >



because of its international circulation, contained a fare different from those of the other editions, which had more or less the same content. Its editor, an imaginative Englishman named Mr. Robinson, had left India for home, and I began shaping its content along with Viswam, with whom it was a joy to work, for his nobility, deep understanding of issues and, above all, the quality of humility he had obtained from his father.

The first issue handled by me had just been out when, one morning at Pondicherry, some officers of the Union Territory were urgently trying to locate me. Shri Nagi Reddi had arrived and their eagerness to assist him reflected the respect he commanded. I was ushered into his presence.

He greeted me before I could. "As I turned the pages of the latest issue of the English *Chandamama*, I knew the difference. I was keen to meet the writer whose touch brought that about," was his compliment, supplemented by some more affectionate words. I could feel in him a father-figure, at once simple and sincere. As years passed and I met him from time to time, I was sure that I had known one of those rare ones who personify humility. Once in a speech, he referred to a scene in a Charlie

Chaplin film. The protagonist, a truant, lay on a bench beside a public park when a battalion marched past him, saluting him, as it appeared. He sprang to his feet and stood erect, smartly returning the greetings. But soon a doubt overtook him: why should the soldiers suddenly feel beholden to him? He looked around and blushed at discovering a magnificent statue of Abraham Lincoln standing behind him! Shri Reddi wished to convey that the accolades he received were really not due to him, but to others who remained behind him.

In the vicissitudes of time, a giant deluge of crisis engulfed the institutions built by Shri Reddi while he had been physically incapacitated in the last phase of his eventful life. *Chandamama* too seemed being swept into extinction. But it survived with a vengeance and that was due to the intrepid and resolute commitment of Viswam to his father's loving project.

It is a tribute to the group of enterprising young men gifted with vision who have rallied behind him today to carry forward the mission to new horizons, because they know *Chandamama* is not just another enterprise but a lofty standard that once inspired them in their childhood and which must be kept aloft. Indeed, during my active involvement in its editing, I got unerring



CHANDAMAMA

"Chandamama is the *Longest Running Children's Magazine in India*" LIMCA Book of Records,
2007 edition

proof of the love it commanded in the hearts of our eminent writers. Whenever we asked them – Mulk Raj Anand, K. A. Abbas and others – for contributions on special occasions, their positive response was instant. The one and only Ruskin Bond, of course, is not only a regular contributor, but also, along with this writer, Editorial Advisor to the magazine.

As one intimately associated with this unique project for more than half of its age, this author, though he is no longer active in its making, shares with the readers the pleasure and the nostalgia this anthology presents. Even though *Chandamama* must move into pastures new and explore novel avenues, this volume is a record of the wide range of varieties the magazine covered over the past six decades – and of the talent, the editorial exercises and the planning that remain invisibly present beneath these pages. I congratulate its compilers and editors and commend the volume to the wide readership as a gentle and pleasant companion.



“... The India of tomorrow could smile only if we could make the children of today smile; that the India of tomorrow would be a strong nation only if we could make the children of today love their great heritage. They must enjoy good literature together, they must be exposed to the Indian spirit together...”

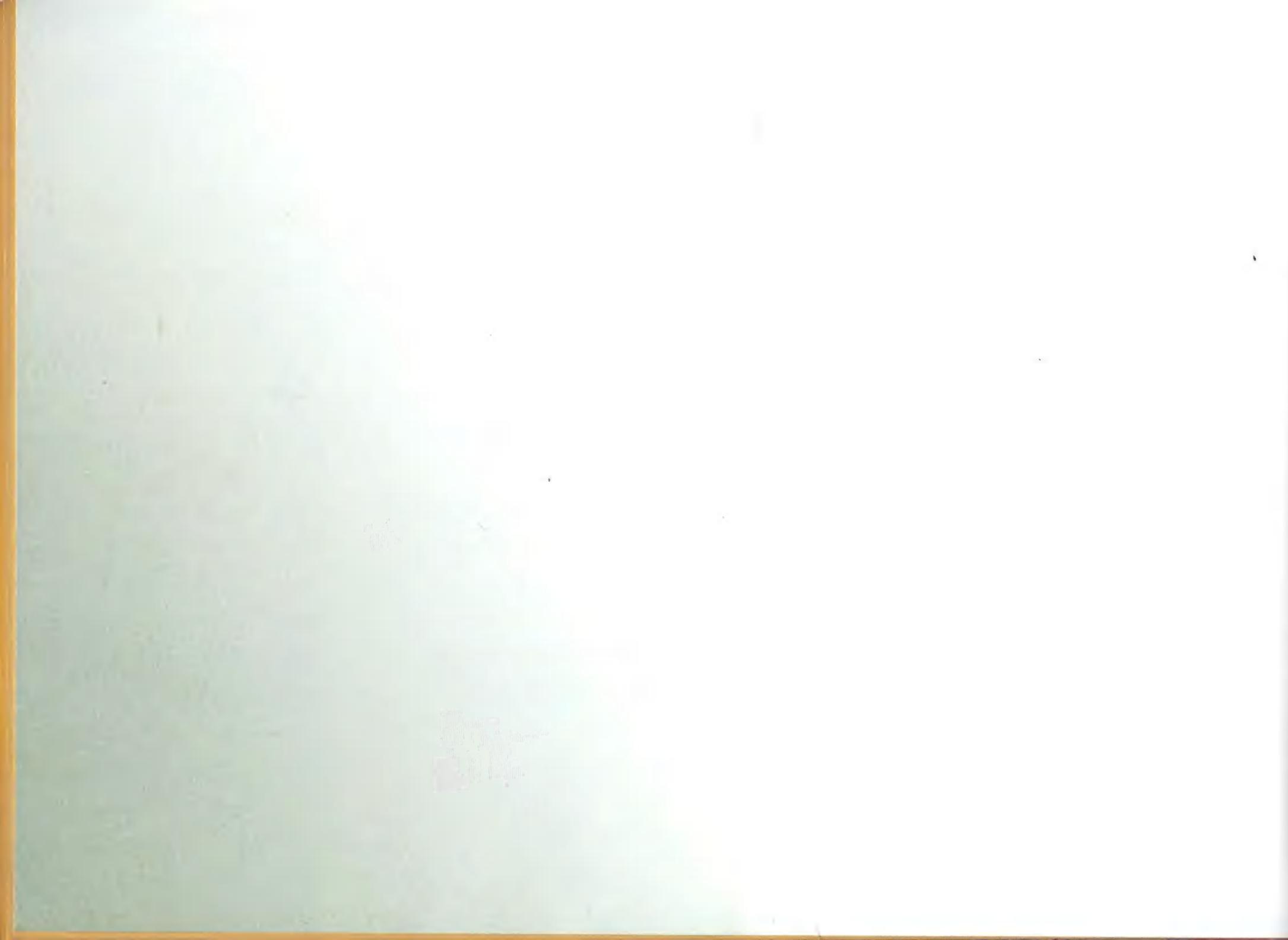
—Sri B. Nagi Reddi

(Message from the founder on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of Chandamama)



Vikram-Vetala Stories





Vikram-Vetala Stories

Chandanama is distinguished from other children's magazines by the Vikram-Vetala stories, which have appeared in every issue for the last fifty odd years. The stories are woven round King Vikramaditya, who is believed to have ruled from Ujjaini (in present-day Madhya Pradesh) some time during the last hundred years before the birth of Christ.

One of the famous tales is the *Vetala Panchanishiti* (25 tales of the vampire) in Sanskrit. This was part of *Brihat Katha* by Gunadhya, later compiled as *Kathasamitsagar*. The first of these stories starts with Vikramaditya trying to capture a vampire who is possessed of a body. The Tantrik, who has asked the king to get him the vampire for certain rituals, has also advised him to maintain absolute silence in the course of this act. The clever vampire narrates a tale ending it with a conundrum, which tickles the king who opens his mouth to answer. The vampire then flies off the shoulders of the king, taking the body along with him to hang from an ancient tree in the cremation ground. For twenty-four nights, Vikramaditya is thus enticed to solve the riddles in each of the stories narrated by the vampire. The next night, the story so baffles the king that he cannot think of an answer, and so does not open his mouth! He is thus able to deliver the vampire to the Tantrik, enabling him to complete the rites.

Differing versions of the Vikram-Vetala stories had later appeared in Indian literature. In 1955, the then Sub-Editor, Mr K. Kurumba Rao, tried to fashion stories with baffling situations and narrate them in the same pattern ending with questions and answers to prod the wisdom of King Vikramaditya. Chandanama has since published these New Tales of Vikram-Vetala numbering nearly 600, which have made the magazine unique in itself.



PUBLISHED
IN 2007

The Prince and the Gundharvas

The cremation ground presented an eerie spectacle that dark night. The moon was hidden behind the clouds, and it was drizzling intermittently. The pitch darkness was relieved only by occasional flashes of lightning that lit up the sombre scene, causing an eerie dance of jerky shadows in the cremation ground. Occasionally, a jackal's spine-chilling howl or the blood-curdling laughter of some invisible evil spirit cut into the silence that hung like a shroud over the area. Altogether, it was a scene that would strike terror into the bravest heart. But nothing could daunt the intrepid King Vikram. Once again he made his way to the gnarled tree from which the ancient corpse was hanging. Bones crunched under his feet, and a screeching ghost rose from the dust in shuddering frenzy as he marched determinedly ahead.

Oblivious to everything but the mission at hand, he brought the hanging corpse down by cutting the rope with his

sword. Slinging it astride his shoulder, he had just begun his return journey when the vampire that possessed the corpse said, "O King! This is a very arduous task that you are performing. Perhaps you have taken it on yourself as a favour to someone else. But I hope that when that person offers to reciprocate by doing something that will benefit you, you won't rashly decline the offer in a fit of emotion, as Prince Vasant of Kirtipur did. Listen to his story."

The tale the vampire narrated went as follows.

Shaktiteja, the King of Gundharvaloka (the domain of the gundharvas, or demi-gods), had a beautiful daughter named Swarnamanjari. However, the greatest beauty in the land was not she, but another nymph named Chitravarnika – a fact that caused Swarnamanjari much heartburn. She became bitterly jealous of Chitravarnika, and was forever looking for an opportunity to hurt her in some way.



Swarnamanjari's opportunity came when her father took her on a visit to earth. She was enraptured by the earth's beauty. Back home, she lost no time in boasting to all her friends about the marvellous sights she had seen. It was not long before her stories of the earth reached Chitravarnika's ears. The vivid description caught her fancy, and filled her with a longing to visit this new place and see its wonders with her own eyes. She told her friends that she had made up her mind to leave for earth forthwith.

When King Shaktiteja heard the news from his daughter, he summoned

Chitravarnika to his court and curtly announced, "Chitra, no denizen of Gundharvaloka may descend to earth without my permission. If you still insist on going, you shall forfeit all your celestial powers. However, if you are able to worship at a sacred pilgrim spot within fifteen days of reaching earth, you will regain your powers. Only then can you return to Gundharvaloka."

The king's warning did not daunt Chitravarnika; if anything, it only strengthened her determination to make the journey.

Floating through the air, she made her descent to earth. She landed beside a beautiful brook in the midst of a forest. The crystal clear water of the brook enticed her to take a dip.

She stepped into the water and had a refreshing bath. As she emerged out of the brook and tried to soar into the air, she realised that she had lost her power to fly. The gundharva king's words had come true.

At this juncture, a young man came riding a horse. On seeing Chitravarnika, he reined in his horse and asked in astonishment, "Young lady, may I know who you are and what you're doing at this lonely spot?

From your looks and bearing, it appears that you're no ordinary woman, but some celestial nymph."

With a sigh, Chitravarnika answered, "You're right. I'm a gundharva maiden. But I have lost my celestial powers, only because I committed the crime of visiting your land!" Seeing sympathy in the young man's eyes, she then told him the whole story.

The young man introduced himself. "I am Vasant, the crown-prince of Kirtipur. With a week left for my coronation, I'm currently out on a tour of my kingdom to get to know it better. I shall take you sightseeing and show you the most beautiful places on earth. In return, I'd like you to take me to Gundharvaloka. I wish to study the administrative policies there, so that I can implement them in my own kingdom when I become the ruler."

"Your aim is a lofty and commendable one indeed," praised Chitravarnika. "But O Prince, I myself have lost the power to fly back to Gundharvaloka. Unless I worship at the holiest pilgrim spot on earth within 15 days, I cannot get my power back. So how can I take you there – much as I would love to do so?"

"Why don't you try to regain your powers? I shall help you," assured Vasant.





"But which is the holiest spot on earth?" asked Chitravarnika

"The holiest destination that I can think of is Mount Kailas, the abode of Lord Siva and Goddess Parvati," answered Vasant. "I can take you there."

On hearing this, Chitravarnika's eyes lit up with fresh hope and she asked, "But would we be able to make it there in just 15 days?"

"Why not? It can be done, if we leave right away," he replied confidently.

The twosome set out on their journey to Mount Kailas. On the way, Prince Vasant pointed out many breathtakingly beautiful sights to Chitravarnika. On the tenth day, they reached Lake Manasarovar.

It was a full-moon night. The lake, dazzling in the moonlight, presented a vision of ethereal beauty. The prince pointed out the sacred mountain peak to the nymph. Praying to Siva and Parvati with all their hearts, both of them prostrated in the direction of the peak.

The next moment, Chitravarnika was enveloped in a flash of light. She realised that she had got back her lost powers. Elated, she turned to Vasant and said,

"Prince, I am eternally indebted to you for your kindness!"

At this juncture, the gundharva king Shaktiteja (who had been following Chitravarnika's progress through his spies) appeared there. Chitravarnika bowed to him and respectfully said, "Your Majesty, this is Prince Vasant of Kirtipur. It is he who helped me regain my powers. In return, I've promised to take him on a visit to Gundharvaloka. May I bring him along as my guest?"

But Shaktiteja glared at her furiously and demanded, "Have you forgotten that human beings are forbidden to enter our domain?" Without waiting for an answer, he then vanished from view.

Chitravarnika heaved a deep sigh. Turning to Vasant, she said, "O Prince! You heard what our king just said. But you needn't be disheartened; I can take you to my domain in defiance of his order. No doubt, I'll have to face some hardships – but that doesn't matter. I shall take you if you wish."

But Prince Vasant promptly retorted, "After what you've said, why would I wish to see your domain? Now, even if your king himself were to change his mind and return

here to personally invite me, I would decline the invitation. I'm not interested in visiting Gundharvaloka."

Chitrvarnika smilingly bade him goodbye and disappeared.

Concluding the story at this point, the vampire said, "O King! Prince Vasant took the trouble to escort Chitrvarnika all the way to Kailas, as a result of which she was able to regain the powers she had lost. In return for this favour, he had requested a chance to visit Gundharvaloka – again, not for his personal enjoyment, but for the noble cause of studying the methods of administration used there, with the intention of implementing them in his own domain when he became the king. Then why did he change his mind and turn down Chitrvarnika's offer of taking him there? Wasn't it the height of foolishness to turn down this golden opportunity? Why did he do it? Was it out of fear of the gundharva king's wrath? Or was it an impulsive decision spurred by hurt pride and anger? If you know the answer, speak out – otherwise, your head shall shatter into fragments!"

Calmly and unhesitatingly, King Vikram answered: "The reason Prince Vasant wished to study the administration of Gundharvaloka was because he had

considered it an exemplary domain, inhabited by ideal beings. But the gundharva king Shaktiteja's unjust and unreasonable behaviour, goaded by his daughter's jealousy, which Vasant subsequently witnessed, made him understand the gundharvas were far from ideal. They too had the same weaknesses as human beings—perhaps to a worse degree! So, there was nothing to be learnt from their methods of administration. This, coupled with the thought that Chitrvarnika would have to suffer her king's punishment for taking him to Gundharvaloka made him drop the idea of visiting that land. There is nothing foolish about his decision."

On hearing this, the vampire nodded in approval, before going off into peal after peal of thunderous laughter. The next moment, he, along with the corpse, moved off the king's shoulder with a jerk and flew back to the tree.

King Vikram gave a little sigh as he gazed upon the scene. Then, he squared his shoulders, drew his sword and retraced his steps towards the ancient tree.





Double Trouble

PUBLISHED
IN 2006

The cremation ground presented an eerie spectacle that dark night. The moon was hidden behind the clouds, and it was drizzling intermittently. The pitch darkness was relieved only by occasional flashes of lightning that lit up the sombre scene, causing an eerie dance of jerky shadows in the cremation ground.

Occasionally, a jackal's spine-chilling howl or the blood-curdling laughter of some invisible evil spirit cut into the silence that hung like a shroud over the area. Altogether, it was a scene that would strike terror into the bravest heart. But nothing could daunt the intrepid King Vikram. Once again, he made his way to the gnarled tree from which the ancient corpse was hanging. Bones crunched under his feet, and a screeching ghost rose from the dust in shuddering frenzy as he marched determinedly ahead.

Oblivious to everything but the mission at hand, he brought the hanging corpse down by cutting the rope with his

sword. Slinging it astride his shoulder, he had just begun his return journey when the vampire that possessed the corpse said, "O King! Braving the dangers of this cremation ground, you have been working relentlessly to achieve your goal. But I doubt whether you will be able to achieve it. Further, even if you do get what you wish for, will you be lucky enough to enjoy it, or will you end up squandering the fruits of your triumph? This was what happened with Jayant, a prince who set out on a mission, only to abandon it when success was within his grasp! Listen to his story."

The tale the vampire narrated was as follows.

Prince Jayant, heir to the throne of Chandragiri, had attained marriageable age. When the king and queen let it be known that they were looking for a suitable bride for their son, marriage proposals from royal families poured in. The queen showed him the portraits of several princesses which she had received, and asked him to make his

choice. However, Jayant did not like any of them. Soon, he was fed up with the whole exercise. Suddenly an idea struck him – 'Why should I agree to having a bride chosen for me? I shall go out into the world and find a girl whom I like, and marry her!'

The idea filled him with excitement. Without telling anyone of his plan, he swiftly saddled his horse and rode out of the palace. Before long, he had left the capital far behind him and was in the countryside.

After riding aimlessly for a few hours, Jayant came to a picturesque wooded valley. The scenic beauty of the place urged him to stop and explore it. He had just dismounted when his attention was drawn to two young women who were plucking flowers from the bushes a few yards away. Their beauty took his breath away.

After watching them from afar for a few moments, Jayant could no longer restrain his curiosity. He approached them and asked, "Ladies, may I know who you are and what you're doing in this lonely wood?"

You're so beautiful that you look hardly human. Are you celestial nymphs?"

The girls giggled. One of them answered, "We're as human as you are. We're twin sisters Shweta and Shyama, daughters of the renowned astrologer Pandit Narayan. Our father loves this valley and has a hut here that he often uses as a retreat. We had come down here for a family holiday, when Father was invited by the neighbouring king for consultation. So he has gone there, leaving us behind."

The prince said, "Permit me to introduce myself. I'm Jayant, the crown-prince of Chandragiri. My parents want me to get married, but I didn't like any of the girls they found for me. I left home in search of a suitable bride of my own choice. Now that I have seen you, I think I need look no farther. I would like to marry one of you. I want to discuss the matter with your father. When does he return from his visit?"

"As a matter of fact, he's expected tomorrow morning," answered the girl who had spoken earlier.

Now, the other girl spoke up: "But before you proceed further, there's something you need to know. Our father is an astrologer whose predictions seldom go

wrong. After examining our horoscopes, he has predicted that both of us are destined to marry one man."

"That's not a problem," said Jayant enthusiastically. "You needn't fear that I shall cause your father's prophesy to go wrong. I have no objection to marrying both of you – if that's what you all wish!"

The first girl asked, "What do you know about us, O Prince?"

"I don't know anything as yet," shot back Jayant, "but I'm ready to learn – whatever you tell me!"

The girls exchanged glances. The second said, "Both of us are very obstinate by nature. We would do anything to get our own way. Also, despite being devoted to each other, we are also fiercely competitive by nature." She paused and looked at her sister.

The latter now spoke up: "One thing we're both very particular about is that the man we marry must be very intelligent. If you don't mind, we'd like to test you."

This challenge appealed to the prince's sporting nature. "By all means!" he said.

"Well, then," she went on, "we've already told you that our names are Shweta





and Shyama. But which of us is Shweta, and which Shyama? Can you answer that, O Prince?"

For a moment, the prince remained silent, studying their faces intently. Then, with a smile, he told the girl who had asked the question, "Evidently, you have been named on the basis of your complexion. Now, you are of a slightly dusky complexion, compared to your sister – so you are Shyama. She is fairer than you; hence, she must be Shweta. Am I right?"

The girl beamed and nodded. "Yes, you are. I must compliment you," she said.

It was now Shweta's turn to pose a question. "Can you find out which of us is the older twin, and which the younger?"

Jayant replied, "I can't tell you that immediately. But if you give me a couple of hours' time, I shall give you the answer."

The girls agreed. Meanwhile, as it was lunchtime, they invited him to their hut. Quickly, they prepared a delicious repast and served him.

"Thank you for a most tasty feast!" said the prince as he washed his hands after the meal.

Seating himself on the chair offered, he turned to Shweta and said, "And now, I

have the answer to your question. You are the older twin."

"Right! But how could you guess?" asked Shweta in admiration.

The prince explained, "Generally, it is the older sister who cooks the food, while the younger helps her in cooking and in serving the food. I observed that you did all the cooking, while Shyama did the serving. That's how I came to this conclusion."

"You're intelligent indeed!" said Shyama. "And now, there's one more thing I want to ask you. According to our horoscopes, both my sister and I are destined to give birth to our children on the same day. But my child will be born a few minutes before Shweta's. In such a scenario, which of the children would you designate as your heir?"

The prince said, "I need some time to think it over before answering. I would now like to take your leave. I shall come and meet your father tomorrow." He then bowed to the girls and departed.

The next morning, Pandit Narayan returned from his visit. The girls told him all about the prince's visit.

However, evening brought not the prince as expected, but a royal messenger,

bearing a letter from the prince to the girls. It read: "After thinking over the matter, I have come to the conclusion that I cannot marry you, after all. Pardon me for not keeping my word to you. Next week, I shall be getting married to Princess Pushpa of Suryapur, the bride chosen by my parents."

Concluding the story at this point, the vampire demanded, "O King, why did Jayant – who had earlier been hell-bent on choosing a bride himself without parental interference – suddenly change his mind, and opt for a traditionally arranged marriage? Perhaps, he had originally been smitten by the girls' beauty, but on subsequent reflection realised that they were commoners, and as such, unsuitable! But if he was determined to marry only a girl of royal blood, why did he embark on this exercise at all? Wasn't it the height of callousness on his part to back out after having virtually promised marriage to the two innocent girls? If you know the answer, speak out. Otherwise, your head shall shatter into smithereens!"

Without hesitation, King Vikram answered, "It's true that Jayant was initially smitten by the girls' beauty and he subsequently rejected them in a rather callous manner. But this was not because



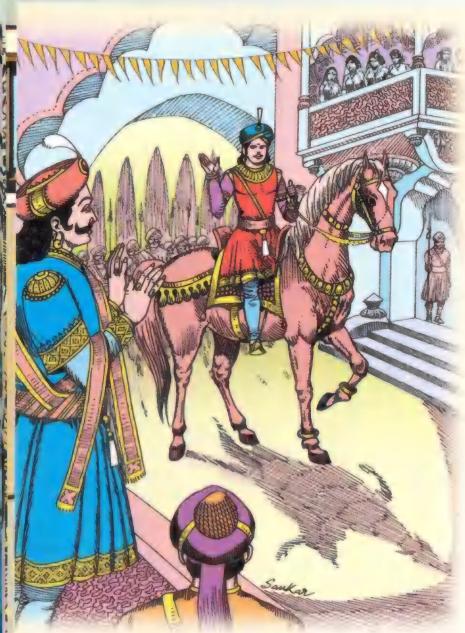
they were commoners, but for another reason. By their own admission, they were obstinate and competitive. On reflection, he realised that these traits, if he made them his queens, would cause havoc in the kingdom. Each would insist on her own son being nominated the heir-apparent. This, in turn, would not only cause strife within the family but weaken the kingdom. Hence, he wisely decided not to marry either or both of them!"

On hearing this, the vampire nodded in approval, before going off into peal after peal of thunderous laughter. The next moment he, along with the corpse, moved off the king's shoulder with a jerk and flew back to the tree. King Vikram gave a little sigh as he gazed upon the scene. Then, he squared his shoulders and retraced his steps towards the tree.



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IN 2005

The Prince and the Nymph



Jt was a dark, moonless night. Occasional flashes of lightning lit up the sombre scene, causing an eerie dance of jerky and frightening shadows in the cremation ground. Occasionally, the spine-chilling howl of a jackal or the blood-curdling laughter of some unseen evil spirit cut into the silence that hung shroud-like over the area. Altogether, it was a scene that could strike a chill in the bravest heart. But nothing could daunt the intrepid King Vikram. Once again, he made his way to the ancient gnarled tree where the corpse was hanging. A bone crunched under his feet and a screeching ghost rose from the dust in shuddering frenzy as he marched ahead.

Oblivious to all this, he reached the tree and brought down the corpse. Slinging it astride his shoulder, he had just begun his return journey when the vampire that possessed the corpse said, "O King! I know you to be unparalleled in both wisdom and learning. No doubt you are well-versed in the rules of demeanour,

and are discerning enough to discriminate between good and bad conduct. Despite this, here you are – wandering in a cremation ground in the middle of the night, on a fool's errand! I fear you have temporarily lost your senses. There are occasions when even the greatest intellectual or scholar can lose his judgement and behave like an utter fool. To illustrate, let me tell you the story of Jayant – a prince who was as handsome as the God of Love, but acted in a very peculiar manner!" The vampire then narrated the following story.

Raghuvarma was the King of Kanchanagiri. He and his queen were deeply depressed because they were childless. After many years of pilgrimages, vows and prayers, a male child was born to them. What was remarkable about the infant was its extraordinary beauty. Its entire being seemed to emanate an almost ethereal radiance, which astonished all those who saw it and thrilled the king and queen. Nor did this radiance diminish as the young prince, named Jayant, grew up

– on the contrary, it seemed to increase with every passing day!

As the years passed, Prince Jayant grew up to be as good-natured as he was good-looking. When he came of age, his parents sent him to a school in the Aravallis, run by the renowned sage Krishnachandra. He returned to the capital after gaining proficiency in the arts, literature, statecraft, and warfare.

The king and queen had decided to conduct the prince's coronation as soon as he had completed his education. But Jayant requested them to wait for some more time, as he wished to undertake a tour of the entire kingdom before taking on the responsibility of governing it. The king gave his consent. He arranged for the best horse in the royal stables to be given to the prince for his journey. Jayant was also given the necessary provisions to sustain him for the duration of his tour.

A week after he had left the palace, he reached the mountains on the eastern

border of the kingdom. There was an ancient temple of Goddess Parvati on the highest mountain peak. It was believed that *yakshas* and other demi-gods used to descend from the heavens to worship at this temple. Having heard a great deal about the glory of the deity, Jayant now desired to visit the temple. He began climbing the peak.

On reaching the summit, he found it very neat and beautiful, offering a panoramic view of the surrounding landscape. Just outside the temple was a pool. The red lotuses bobbing on its surface offered a magnificent view against the crystal-clear water.

After taking a bath in the pool, Jayant entered the temple to pay his respects to the deity. As he was coming out, his attention was arrested by the sweet strains of a Veena coming from the temple. Who could be playing the instrument at this deserted spot? Filled with curiosity, he followed the music to its source.

Soon, he came across a maiden of indescribable beauty, who was engrossed in playing the Veena. A glance at her was enough to tell Jayant that she was no ordinary woman, but a celestial damsel.

As the damsel's eyes fell on the handsome prince, she kept aside her Veena

and said, "I'm Chitralekha, a nymph; may I know who you are?"

Jayant told her all about himself. When he had finished, Chitralekha said, "I received many proposals of marriage from demi-gods and other celestial beings. But I did not like any of them, and so remain unmarried. Now for the first time, I've come across someone whose wondrous good looks hold me spellbound. Marry me, and we shall go away to the celestial world where we can live forever in great luxury and bliss!"

Jayant was startled by this unexpected proposal. He replied, "I'm one who will shortly become the king of this land. At present, I'm out on a tour of the kingdom to see for myself the joys and sorrows of my people before ascending the throne. Right now, I have no intention to get married. Let me take leave of you now."

But Chitralekha stopped him, saying, "It's all right if you don't wish to marry me. But please, at least allow me to spend a few days in your company! Can I come with you on your tour?" Seeing that he could not shake her off, Jayant was forced to agree.

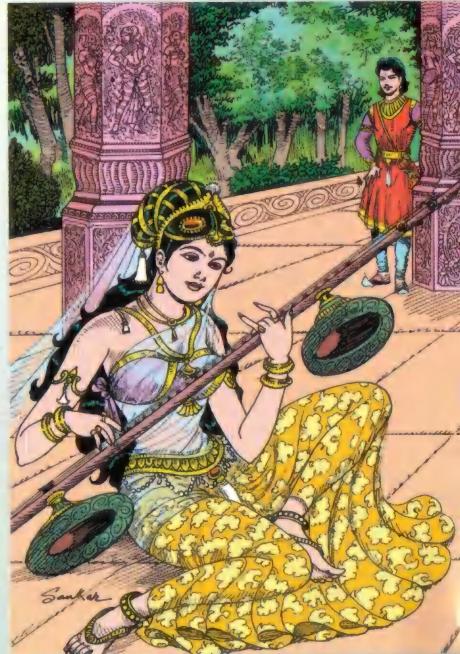
Thereafter, Chitralekha accompanied him to all the places he visited. At each place, he met the common people and

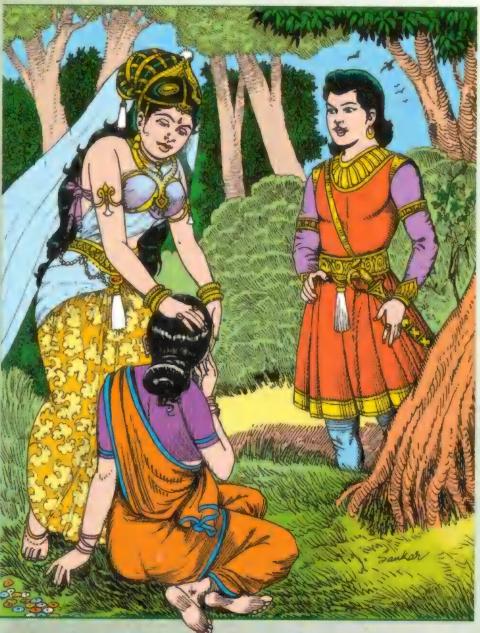
talked to them. He found out the problems they faced and arranged to solve them. The people welcomed him with joy and offered him their humble food, which he readily accepted. At times, he had to sleep on the bare floor. Chitralekha, the nymph who was used to heavenly luxury, also had to perforce adjust to these living arrangements.

One day, as the two were travelling through a forest, they saw a young woman who was sitting under a tree, weeping bitterly. As they went closer, they saw that the woman was unsightly in appearance.

Prince Jayant asked her, "Who are you and why are you crying?"

The woman replied, "My name is Jalaja. My ugliness is the bane of my life. I am in love with a noble youth named Ravi, who feels that one's character is more important than external beauty. He loves me for my nature and personality, and is determined to marry me and none other. But his mother refuses to let her son marry an ugly girl. She has threatened Ravi that if he weds me, she will end her life by jumping into a well! Unable to endure all this any longer, I decided to solve the problem once and for all, and came away into this jungle to commit suicide. But now, I am not able to summon up enough courage to do it!"





Jayant was deeply touched by Jalaja's story. Turning to Chitralekha, he asked, "You are a nymph, with divine powers – can't you help this unfortunate girl by altering her appearance?"

Chitralekha smiled. Going close to Jalaja, she gently stroked her head thrice. Lo and behold, the next moment, the unsightly girl turned into a damsel of incomparable beauty! Overwhelmed with joy, Jalaja fell at the feet of both Jayant and Chitralekha, and thanked them profusely before taking leave of them.

After she had vanished from view, Jayant turned towards Chitralekha to praise her for her good deed. But as his eyes fell on her face, he was rooted to the ground in shock. Was this the same nymph who, only moments ago, had been a vision of peerless beauty? Her face had lost its glow, her gait its grace. She now appeared old, haggard and ugly!

Quite a few moments passed before the horrified Jayant could find his tongue. He asked her, "What was the need for such a great sacrifice? Why did you give away your beauty to Jalaja?"

Without any sign of emotion, Chitralekha calmly replied, "After moving

about in your company all these days, I have come to understand the happiness one gets by selfless service. Also, this was the only way by which Jalaja could be made beautiful. That's why I did it! It doesn't matter if I'm ugly; she is more in need of good looks than I am!"

Overwhelmed by emotion, Jayant exclaimed, "Who says you're ugly? Your entire being shines with divine beauty!" He then reached out to clasp her hand and said, "I would like to marry you!"

The next moment, there was another miracle. Gone was Chitralekha's ugliness – her divine beauty was back in all its radiance!

At this point, the vampire concluded his story and demanded, "O King! There is no doubt that Jayant was an exceedingly handsome man – so good-looking as to win the heart of even a heavenly damsel! Having rejected the hand of the breathtakingly beautiful nymph, why then did he offer to marry her after she had turned ugly? Doesn't his behaviour appear inconsistent and irrational in the extreme? Answer my question if you can. If you remain silent despite knowing the answer, your head shall shatter into a thousand fragments!"

King Vikram calmly replied, "There is nothing inconsistent or irrational about Jayant's behaviour. It is evident that he was an enlightened youth who did not attach much importance to transient physical beauty. He valued virtues and inner beauty more. Initially he rejected Chitralekha's proposal because he found her shallow and obsessed with her good looks. But Chitralekha underwent a change of heart after coming in contact with the noble prince and moving with him at close quarters. His selflessness and love for his people appealed to her and she resolved to follow the same path. As her better nature was roused, her vanity disappeared and she unhesitatingly gave her beauty away to one who needed it. Her self-sacrifice and generosity were the aspects of beauty that Jayant saw in her, when he agreed to marry her. It was his touch that restored her to her former beauty – such is the power of nobility!"

As soon as he had finished speaking, the vampire, along with the corpse, moved off his shoulder with a jerk and flew back to the tree. With a little sigh, King Vikram squared his shoulders and retraced his steps towards the tree, his dogged determination evident in his steady gait.



Three Gifted Men



Once again King Vikram returned to the tree, took down the corpse, threw it across his shoulder and began to walk towards the burial ground. When he had walked just a few paces, the Vetala in the corpse began to speak. "O King!" he said. "You are extraordinarily gifted and courageous. But are you using those talents properly? Or are you squandering them on

wasted exercise, rather like the three gifted men in the well-known story. Shall I narrate it to you?"

And the Vetala began: "Down in a southern state, there once lived a rich landlord who had one son and three daughters. The daughters had been recently married to well-to-do young men. But the son, Sanghameshwar, was yet to be married.

One year after his sisters went away to their marital houses, Sanghameshwar decided to visit them to find out if they were happy. So off he went on his mission. When he reached his eldest sister's house, she welcomed him warmly. Finding his sister alone that afternoon, Sanghameshwar asked her the all-important question: "How are you, sister? How do you get along with your husband?"

She sighed. "I can't say that I'm very happy," she said. "My husband is very talented and he is also very wealthy. He is a gifted archer, you know. But there is very little work that he can find. So every morning, to keep his skills finely honed, he practices archery using me as his target. He places a bowl on my head and aims at it. I feel quite faint with fear that I may be hit!" Sanghameshwar nodded thoughtfully and soon left.

A couple of days later, he reached his second sister's house. 'But why does she look so wan and pale?' When he enquired after her welfare, she burst into tears. "I was a lot happier at our father's house!" she wept. "My husband has an extraordinary gift: he can see what is going on in all the three worlds. But what's the use? He spends the whole day watching the celestial dances

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in Lord Indra's court in the heavens and has no time at all for me."

Her brother consoled her as best he could and promised to do something to change his brother-in-law. He then left for his youngest sister's house.

Here, too, it was a similar story. The girl was unhappy because her husband did not know how to use his talents. "My husband runs faster than the wind, but the problem is, he doesn't know how to use this skill," explained the girl. "Every morning, he dashes off to one pilgrim centre after another all over the country and lights lamps at all the temples he visits. He returns home only at night and he is so exhausted by then that he has very little time to do anything or talk to me." She sighed heavily.

Sanghameshwar took leave of his sister and returned home. After consulting his parents, he invited his sisters and their husbands home for a few days. They arrived.

"I hear that you are all very talented," he told his brothers-in-law. "Yet I find you do not make proper use of your talents. If you would just take the trouble of visiting the Chola kingdom and meeting the king, you may benefit from that exercise."

The brothers-in-law consented and immediately set out for the Chola kingdom. When they reached the capital, they lodged with an old woman. The three men were surprised to find that all the men and women that they came across in that city looked glum and worried. They asked the old woman, "Grandmother, why do all of you look so sad? What is worrying you?"

The old woman replied: "My sons, you little know how uncertain our future is. Our king is childless and his health is deteriorating day by day. He has been advised by his physicians to name his successor and train him in the ways of administration. Although our country abounds with capable youngsters who can be trained to be a ruler, our king has chosen not to pick any of them. He has set an impossible task and says only the one who can complete that task can succeed him!"

"Tell me, what's the task?" asked the oldest of the three gifted men.

"The king says that the one who brings him a handful of fresh *devaparijata* flowers will be made the king," said the old woman.

"*Devaparijata* flowers?" the three men asked, puzzled. "What are they? Where do they grow?"

"They are rare flowers and the nearest shrub that bears them is more than a thousand miles away from here. They fade away within a few hours of blooming. How can flowers brought from such a distance remain fresh till they are handed over to the king here?"

The three men discussed the issue. At last here was an opportunity to put their talents to use. So, they went up to the king and said, "We can bring you fresh devaparijata flowers, your majesty."

"By all means, my boys!" replied the king. "You're welcome to try your luck!"

Then the three went out of the city. The man with the extraordinary vision looked all around and pointed his finger in one direction. "There it is, the devaparijata shrub. I am able to see it. It is in a garden that is beyond a forest two thousand miles away from here."

"Thanks, my friend," said the man who ran faster than wind. "It's now my turn to prove my mettle. I shall get there and back in no time at all." He started on his way and was soon out of sight. But the one with the extraordinary vision kept an eye on him all the time. "He has plucked the flowers!" he narrated excitedly, just a few

moments after the man had left. "He has started back and is now entering the forest. Oh no! A tiger is stalking him. It's now catching up with him. What shall we do?"

"Don't worry!" That was the archer, who was now alert. "Just point out the exact direction where the tiger is and I'll shoot arrows at him."

It was soon done. A few moments after the arrows were shot, the man with the vision said, "Ah, your arrow has found its mark. The tiger has fallen dead."

No sooner had he finished saying that than the runner was back with the fresh fragrant devaparijata flowers. They went to the king and offered him the flowers.

"Which one of you is responsible for bringing these flowers?" the king asked.

They replied, "All three of us had pooled our talents."

The king was in a fix. He did not know which of the three could be made the next king.

Having narrated the story, Vetala said, "O King, which one of them deserved to be the next king? If you know the answer and still do not speak, your head shall split into smithereens."

"Not one of the three deserved to be the king," answered King Vikram. "They were no doubt very highly gifted, but they had no capacity to make proper use of their talents. It was the landlord's son that showed such capacity."

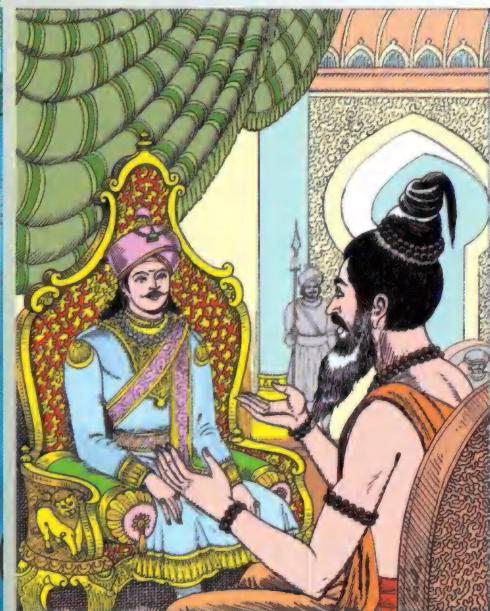
"Of the four, it is only he who deserves to be the king, because he is astute enough to know how best to use the potential of each man."

As soon as Vikram had given the answer, the Vetala slipped off his shoulder and glided back to the tree.



PUBLISHED
IN 2002

The Strange Silence



Vit was a terrible night. The rain came down in torrents and thunder rumbled threateningly. The frequent flashes of lightning revealed the ugly vistas of grinning ghouls. King Vikram tripped over the gnarled, knotty roots of the ancient tree as he reached for the corpse that dangled from its branches. He put the corpse on his shoulder and started walking back. He had a rendezvous to keep with the strange mendicant.

"What makes you so determined to carry me away from here?" asked the Vetala who possessed the corpse. But King Vikram kept silent. "Your silence is enigmatic, rather like King Sushanta's!" commented the Vetala. "Have you heard of him? Let me regale you with his story to make your journey easier!" And he narrated this story:

King Sushanta of Pushpanagar was wise and noble. He gave alms to holy men and gifts to deserving artists and poets. He made sure that his subjects were happy and that his kingdom was prosperous. If he had a fault, it was anger. He would fly into a rage

if something did not happen as he wanted it to. Once when the royal cooks messed up a special dish that the king had ordered for some very special guests, they not only lost their jobs but were also sent out of the kingdom immediately.

If an officer was found to be guilty of some lapse in duty, he invited the king's wrath. Not only would he lose his job, but his life. The king's reputation of being an angry man made sure that the people lived in uneasy calm.

One day a holy man appeared in his court and said that he wanted the king's permission to hold discourses at the temples in the kingdom.

"Who are you, O noble one? Where are you from?" asked the king courteously.

"I'm Pranananda. I've just come here from the Himalayas where I was meditating for the last decade," replied the saintly man. "Meditation had brought me peace of mind. But my guru said the purpose of my life should be not only to seek salvation for

myself, but to show the path to other less fortunate men and women. That is what has brought me here!"

King Sushanta was impressed. "Swamiji! We shall be grateful if you'll settle down here and guide me and my subjects," he said.

The saint laughed. "O King, I've decided not to settle down in any place. But your affection and kindness ties me to your kingdom. I shall stay here for some days and try to make myself useful to your people!"

The king ordered a cottage to be built for the swamiji in the royal park. He called the park keeper, Sumangala, and asked him to look after the swamiji's comforts.

Soon Sumangala and the swamiji became great friends. Sumangala lived with his wife and two sons in a cottage in the park. Every morning, after prayers, Pranananda would spend a couple of hours with the king. Sushanta listened earnestly to swamiji's discourses and tried to act according to his wise advice. Swamiji would



then go around, addressing the people gathered at the temples.

At night, he would have dinner with Sumangala, who lived in a cottage in the park with his wife and two sons. The swamiji would tell wonderful stories to the two boys well into the night.

One day, when the king and the swamiji were at the park, Sumangala was trimming a bush nearby. He noticed that some bees were bothering the swamiji. He rushed to him, waving his hands to keep the bees away.

But the king did not like the way Sumangala had interrupted the conversation. "How dare you jump between us like that?" he shouted. "Who asked you to interfere? Had the bees got intolerable, wouldn't I have helped swamiji? Get out of my sight! I don't want to see you here again!" he shouted.

Sumangala was stunned. But swamiji went to his rescue. "Don't shout at him, my son," he urged the king. "After all, his intention was good. It is easy to get angry. But decisions taken in a moment of anger will prove to be wrong. When you are angry, the best course is to be silent till you feel that you are once again your old

reasonable self. If in a fit of anger you send away Sumangala, you might not easily find another capable and honest man to replace him."

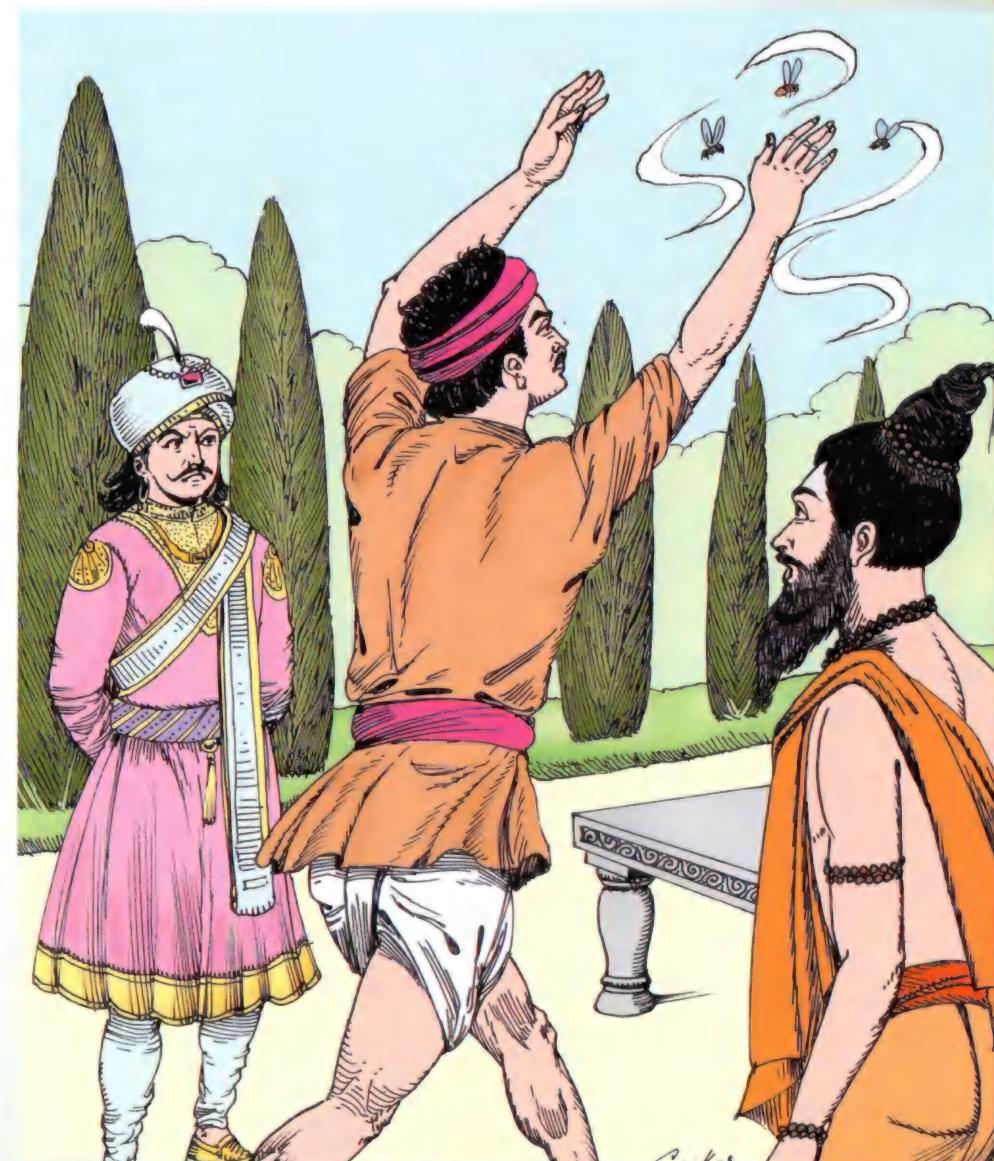
King Sushanta accepted his advice and pardoned Sumangala.

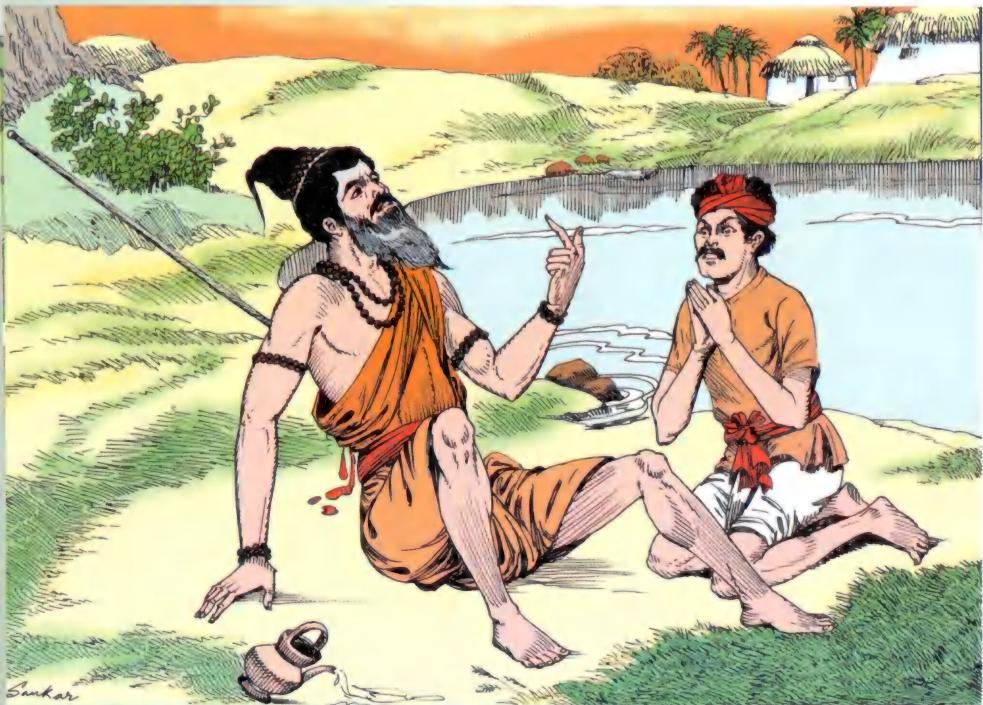
Pranananda's words of wisdom had a tremendous impact on the king. A few months later, however, the swamiji became very restless. One day, he told the king: "My goal in life is to help as many people as I can, and not just the citizens of your kingdom. I would like to travel to other lands and guide many people."

But the king would not hear of his going away. Then swamiji relented and said he would return to Pushpanagar every third month and spend a month with the king. King Sushanta had to accept this.

Three months passed. One evening Pranananda came back to Pushpanagar and went to his cottage. Sumangala did not notice his arrival. It was now dark and swamiji was thirsty. He went to the pond in the park to fill his jug with water. As he dipped his jug into the pond to fill it, it made a loud gurgling sound.

Sumangala, whose cottage was nearby, heard the noise. He thought some animals





had entered the garden and were at the pond. He rushed out and threw his spear in the direction of the pond.

"Alas! The spear pierced swamiji and he cried aloud. Sumangala recognized his voice and ran out in horror. He found swamiji gasping for breath. He fell at his feet and begged his pardon. The swamiji said, "Remove the spear from my back so that I can die in peace." Sobbing, Sumangala did

as he was told and gently laid him on the ground.

"Forgive me," he sobbed. "I did not mean to do it."

Swamiji smiled: "I know it. I forgive you." And he breathed his last.

Suddenly, Sumangala was struck with fear. 'What would happen to me and my family if the king were to hear of this?' he wondered. He rushed to his cottage, told the whole story to his wife, and along with their two young children, they disappeared into the night.

The next day the guards discovered the swamiji's body in the park. They searched for Sumangala but could not find him anywhere. They concluded that he must have killed the swamiji for some reason. They took the news to the king. King Sushanta was furious. He ordered a manhunt, but Sumangala could not be traced.

Meanwhile Sumangala had taken up a job in a neighbouring kingdom. But he was not happy. He wanted to return to Pushpanagar. When one year had passed, he ventured into Pushpanagar and met an old friend, a courtier in the palace. He

requested him to find out if the king had forgiven him for the swamiji's death.

The courtier found an opportunity to broach the subject with the king. The royal gardener was asking the king for some implements. The courtier intervened: "Sumangala was a wonderful gardener! He did not spend so much on implements."

But the king did not say a word. The courtier told Sumangala to stay away. Six months later, at Sumangala's request, the courtier took up his cause. This time, too, the king remained silent.

Another six months passed. Sumangala was now quite desperate. This time he risked his life and went to Pushpanagar with his family. Instead of going to his friend, he presented himself at the court and fell at the feet of the king. He narrated the whole story of the swamiji's untimely death.

"I know it all, Sumangala. I know you could not have done it intentionally. Come back and join my service once again!" said the king.

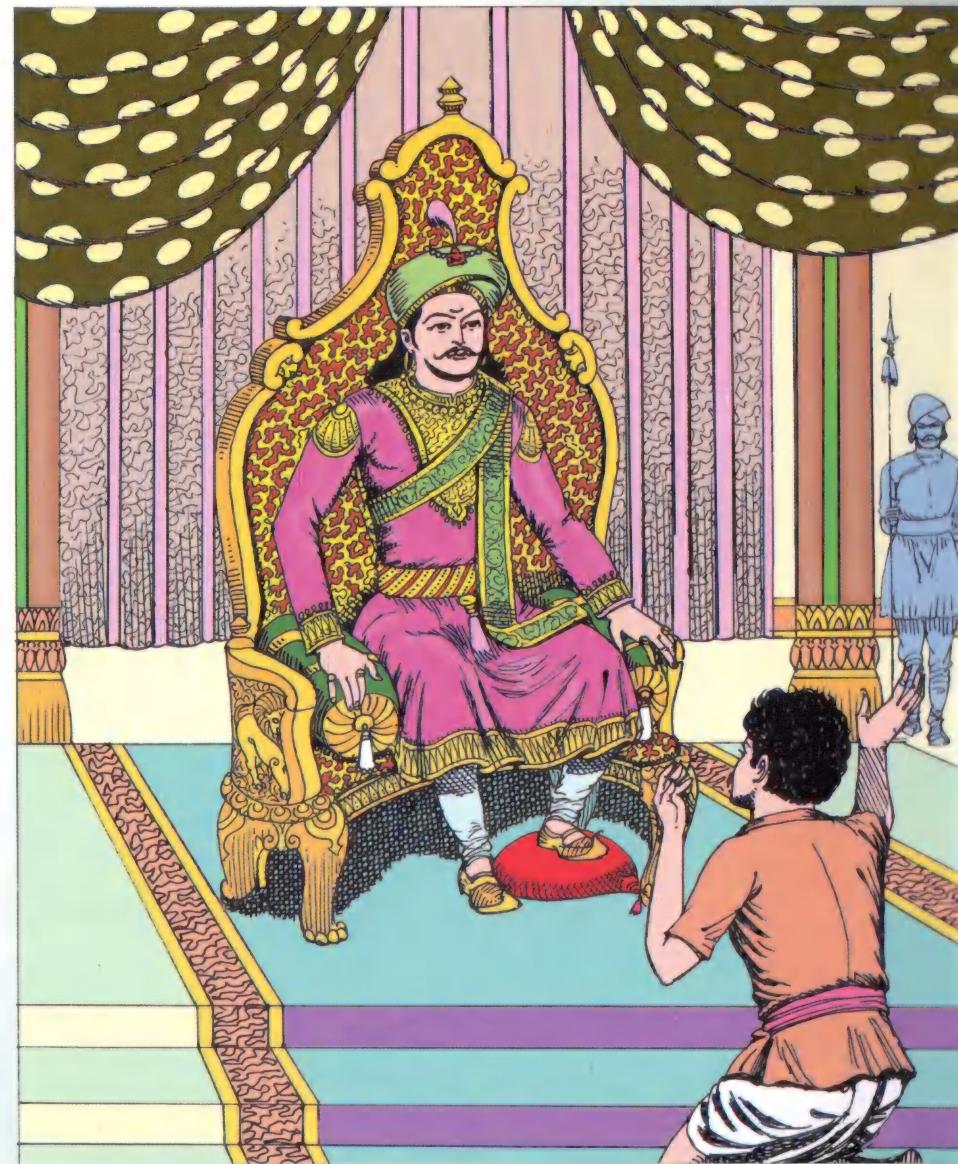
Here Vetala stopped his narration and turned to the king. "O king, when Sumangala's friend sang the park-keeper's praises in the court the first two times,

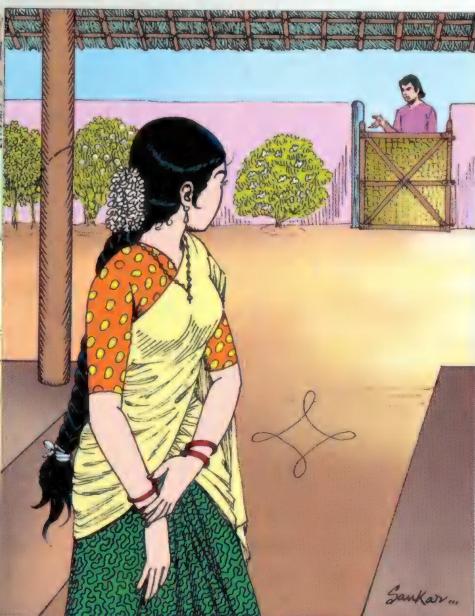
the king would not react at all. But when Sumangala himself went and fell at the king's feet two years after the accidental death of swamiji, the king took him back. Doesn't this show the king to be inconsistent in his behaviour? Do you think that only when he saw Sumangala did he realise that he couldn't have killed the swamiji deliberately? If you know the answers to these questions, but choose to remain silent, your head will split into a thousand pieces!"

King Vikram replied promptly: "No, King Sushanta was not inconsistent in his behaviour. And he must have realised long back that the swamiji's death had been accidental, and not deliberate, for didn't you say that he was a wise ruler? Surely he knew his park-keeper well! If he had ordered a manhunt for Sumangala, it was because he was blinded by anger at the thought of the untimely and violent death of swamiji, whom he revered very much. We know that anger was the king's greatest weakness. Swamiji had once advised him not to do anything when he was angry, but to wait till he was his old reasonable self. The king was still angry at the park-keeper when the courtier pleaded on his behalf. But he remembered his mentor's words and

remained silent, perhaps because he was afraid that he might, in a fit of rage, harm Sumangala if he were to present himself before him. Two years after the incident, the wound had healed by the time Sumangala made his desperate appearance in the court. And the king reacted in a reasonable way. The king was only following the wise words of his mentor when he held his tongue and let time heal his anger before he felt able to talk rationally to Sumangala."

No sooner had King Vikram answered than the Vetala once again gave him the slip and glided back to the ancient tree. And King Vikram drew his sword and followed the Vetala.





Malathi's Choice

PUBLISHED
IN 2001

Dnce again the determined Vikramaditya climbed the tree where the Vetala had taken the corpse. He patiently brought down the body, placed it on his shoulders again and climbed down with the heavy burden. Then he walked briskly towards the cremation ground.

The Vetala possessing the corpse addressed him saying, "O King, it is now midnight and this place is dark and frightening. Spirits and ghosts wander around here at this hour. Your life could be in great danger. Are you trying to solve a difficult problem or escape from an embarrassing situation that you are willing to undertake such a hard and impossible task? You don't seem to want to leave this cremation ground at all. Do keep this in mind. There are some people who feel that every small issue is a big problem and they get tensed, while others do not think enough about major issues and treat them very casually. This can lead to wrong decisions. I hope you are not one of those. I would like to warn you not to treat major decisions in life casually. There was this

young girl called Malathi who threw away the good fortune that came her way in a most casual manner. Let me tell you her story so that you can relax your mind and maybe you'll also learn something from it." The Vetala then began his narration.

In the jungles of Vindhyaachal in a hut lived a woodcutter with his daughter Malathi. Her mother had died when she was very young and her father had brought her up all by himself. Now that she had grown into a beautiful girl, he was anxious that he should find a suitable husband for her.

One day, the woodcutter heard that his sister, who lived in a village nearby, had taken ill. So he set off early the next day to call on her. He had to leave Malathi alone at home as their cow was expecting a calf.

After her father left, Malathi finished her chores. Then she washed her hair and went out into the garden. She walked around picking up flowers and singing in a sweet voice.

Suddenly dark clouds gathered and it threatened to rain. Continuing her singing,

she sat down to string the flowers into a garland. She finished making the garland and was about to wear it in her hair when she heard a voice. "Even the nightingale has been silenced by your lovely song," said the voice. "How sweetly you sing!"

Malathi was startled and turned around towards the voice, when a young man stepped forward and said, "My name is Madhu Kumar. I am a lover of music and I was enchanted by your sweet voice."

Malathi did not know how she should react to these words. As she looked around in confusion, there was a sudden cloudburst. Malathi asked the young man to step into the verandah and said, "O dear, you're all wet!"

Madhu Kumar came inside quickly. He looked around and was greatly impressed. "Your home looks lovely. Aren't you afraid of living alone in the middle of this forest?"

"I was born and brought up here. My father lives with me, so why should I be afraid?" replied Malathi.

Just then a voice was heard: "Is anybody inside? May I come in? The rain shows no sign of stopping!"

Malathi opened the door to find a handsome young man on the verandah. She welcomed him, saying: "Do come in. You seem to have got drenched."

The young man was surprised to see such a beautiful girl in the middle of the forest. For a moment he was speechless. But composing himself as he entered, he said: "My name is Sundardas. I'm on my way to my friend's wedding and got caught in the rain."

Pointing at Madhu Kumar on the cot, Malathi said: "He is Madhu Kumar. He too was caught in the rain."

Just then another voice said: "I'm sorry for entering without permission, but the storm is very severe and I'm completely drenched."

Before Malathi could answer him, the third man who had come in said: "My name is Ravishankar. I'm on my way to town on business, and was caught in the rain. Heaven knows when there'll be a let up!"

After a while there was a let up and the three men left one after the other. Madhu Kumar was the first to leave and

Malathi went up to the door to see him off. He told her quietly: "Your sweet voice has enchanted me and I've fallen in love with you. I shall send my brother to your father to propose a marriage between us."

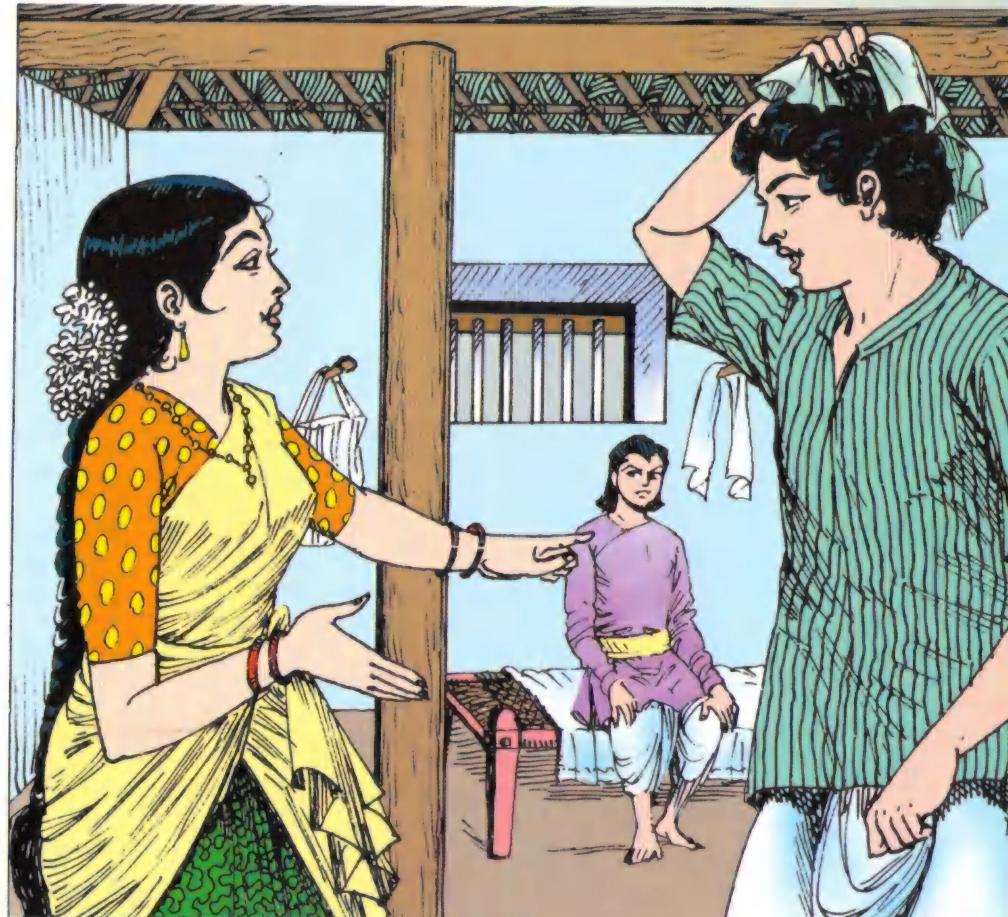
Sundardas spoke to Malathi secretly before he left: "You're so beautiful. In fact, you make a good match for a handsome man like me. I never thought I would ever meet such a person. I shall ask my parents to come and meet your father tomorrow and propose our marriage."

Ravishankar also confessed that he had fallen in love with her and told Malathi that he was a wealthy trader. "It'll be so pleasant to come here to relax after the strain and stress of business. I shall ask my mother to call on your father tomorrow with a proposal."

When her father returned, Malathi asked him: "How's aunty?"

Her father said: "She isn't too well. I'm afraid she may not live very long. She's worried that she may not live long enough to see her son Ramapati married."

"Why should she grieve about such a matter? Why doesn't she get him married to a girl of her choice?" asked Malathi.



"My sister has certainly been unwise about her son's marriage," said the woodcutter. "First, she thought she might be able to find a bride from a rich family, but her dreams did not materialise. I wanted



to suggest that she should make you her daughter-in-law, but we're not rich like her. But she has now raised the subject and says if your wedding with Ramapati takes place, she can die peacefully. I've also agreed. Now Ramapati wants to know if you are willing to marry him."

Malathi smiled: "Father, after you left in the morning, there was a heavy

downpour in which three young men got caught. They came into our hut to escape from the rain. The first one is a lover of music, the second one is very handsome, and the third one is a wealthy trader. Each one of them proposed to me before he left, saying they will send their people to talk to you about it."

"Really?" said her father. "All three of them must surely be rich. Forget your cousin Ramapati. Tell me if you'll accept any one of the three."

"Father, I shall marry only Ramapati," said Malathi without any hesitation.

The Vetal stopped his narration there and said: "O King, it is clear that Malathi made a foolish decision. Her three suitors were rich and accomplished young men. She should have chosen one of them as her husband. She would have then led a life of comfort and luxury. Instead, she chose an illiterate farmer like Ramapati as her groom. Choosing a life partner is a serious matter, because it affects one's future. But Malathi treated the whole thing so casually and made up her mind without giving a thought to the consequences. I think she spoilt her future and did not take advantage of the fortune that came her way. Tell me if my judgement is right. If you know the answer

and yet keep quiet, your head will explode into tiny pieces."

Vikramaditya said: "What can be a serious and complex issue or how a simple and easy decision could be made depends on the personality and emotional attitudes of the person facing the problem. According to their experience they take the best decision possible. Malathi did not do anything wrong by deciding to marry her cousin because she felt it was the most sensible and natural thing to do. Each of the three suitors, who desired to marry her after a very brief acquaintance, took it for granted that she would only be too happy to marry him. They did not feel it necessary to ascertain her wish. Ramapati was the only one who asked for her opinion. Those who did not feel it necessary to ask for her opinion before marriage were unlikely to change their attitude later. So your statement that Malathi made a foolish decision and ruined her future is not correct or valid."

The Vetal, having successfully got King Vikramaditya to break his silence, flew off to the ancient tree with the corpse.

The Sculptor Who Did the Impossible

PUBLISHED
IN 2000

Dark was the night and weird the atmosphere. It rained from time to time. Gusts of wind shook the nearby forest. Between thunderclaps and the moaning of jackals could be heard the eerie laughter of spirits.

But King Vikram swerved not. He climbed the ancient tree once again and brought the corpse down. However, as soon as he began crossing the desolate cremation ground with the corpse lying astride on his shoulder, the Vetala that possessed the corpse said: "O King, your labours at this unearthly hour intrigue me. From the answers you give to my riddles, I presume that you are wise. At the same time I feel you are rather foolish. Maybe you have two selves in yourself — one wise and the other foolish. Perhaps, sometimes the wise self dominates your personality, at other times your foolish self dominates it. Well, it can happen with several sensible people. Let me

cite an instance. Pay attention to it; that should bring you some relief."

The Vetala went on:

Long ago, the Kingdom of Chakravak was ruled by King Sasankadev. His daughter, Princess Shampalata was as beautiful as a nymph. But hardly anybody knew about it because in those days and in that part of the world, girls of the royal families never appeared in public.

One day while the princess was talking to her father, an idea flashed in the king's mind. As years would pass, like everything else, the beauty of the princess, too, would change. Nobody would ever know that such a beauty had once lived on this earth. Would there be any sculptor who could carve a figure in marble of his charming daughter?

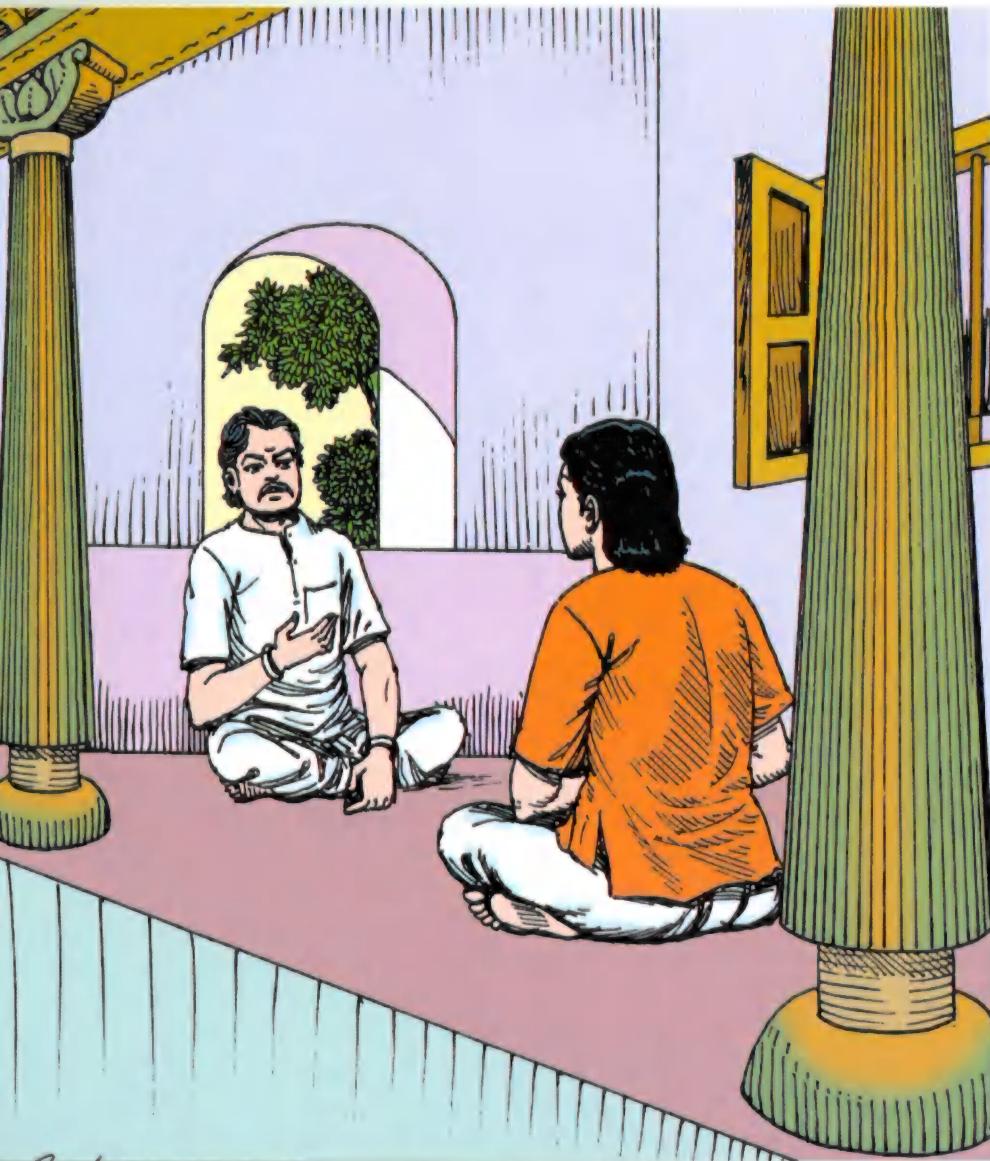
He discussed his idea with the queen and the minister. The question was, how

could any sculptor create a figure of the princess without taking a look at her? But there was no question of the princess appearing before any sculptor as a model!

It was decided that the sculptors who would volunteer to try their hands at the project would be given a description of the princess by her chief maid. After the sculptors created the figures according to the description, the king and queen would judge which of them resembled the princess most. The creator of that sculpture would then be made the chief sculptor of the kingdom and occupy a high position in the royal court.

The announcement was duly made and a number of sculptors gathered on the appointed day to listen to the maid's description of the princess. Thereafter, they engaged themselves in giving shape to their visions of the princess on blocks of marble. After a few months, the figures were





ready and were carried into the queen's apartments in the palace. The king, the queen and a few of their confidants looked at them, but rejected all of them!

Once again the announcement was made, calling upon new hands to participate in the project.

In a frontier village of the kingdom of Chakravak lived an artist named Rajshekhar. His son, Viraj, was a highly talented sculptor. He was still in the process of learning the art from a great sculptor who belonged to the neighbouring kingdom of Vajrapur. The King of Vajrapur was a great lover of all kinds of art and he patronised all budding artists.

Viraj was on a visit to his village when he heard the king's announcement.

'Is it at all possible to carve someone's figure by only listening to a description of the person?' Viraj wondered.

"My son, it is possible in principle. There are more than one way to do that. One can develop an inner vision through Yoga; one can see a person through a wall or a screen through *tantra*. A third way is to take the help of some supernatural beings," said Rajshekhar.

"Father, I'm neither a yogi nor a tantrik. But I have a desire to become the chief sculptor of our kingdom. I don't know how and where to find any supernatural being who can help me create an exact image of the princess," said Viraj.

"I can tell you where to meet them. This, indeed, is a secret. Not far from our village, as you know, there is the forest Kanakaranya, around the lake Kanaka. On full-moon nights, Yakshis descend on the banks of the lake and play hide-and-seek. If you can somehow please any of them, your mission can be accomplished," informed Rajshekhar.

The full-moon night was only two days away. Viraj set out for the Kanakaranya forest in the afternoon on the day preceding the night and reached the lake Kanaka in the evening. He sat down under a tree and waited for his opportunity.

The full moon shone on the lake and the trees. The atmosphere was calm and fragrant with numerous forest flowers. Suddenly, Viraj heard a sweet giggle. He followed the sound and saw two beautiful damsels coming towards him.

He greeted them with folded hands.

"How dare you, a human being, tarry here at night? Aren't you afraid of wild animals and giants?" asked one of the damsels.

It was not difficult for Viraj to guess that they were Yakshis.

"O kind-hearted Devis! I am not afraid of anything because I know that you will protect me from any danger," said Viraj.

"Do you have so much faith in us?" they asked. "Good. But what brings you here at this hour?"

Viraj told them the reason for his presence there and for waiting for them. They were amused, but Viraj could feel that they had nothing but sympathy for him.

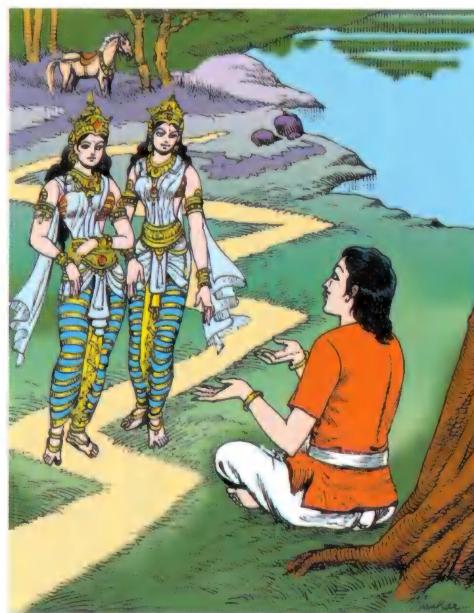
"Look here, young man, it is not possible to carve anyone's figure without seeing the person. But we will help you make the impossible possible, provided you agree to carve our figures, too, in stone," said the Yakshis.

"I shall deem it my good fortune to carve your images," said Viraj.

"Thanks," said one of the Yakshis. "My name is Chanchala and my friend's name is Chapala. You can fix your eyes on Chapala and see what happens."

As Viraj kept looking at Chapala, her appearance began to change. In a moment she became a different person.

"The figure Chapala has assumed is that of the princess. You can begin carving the image looking at her," advised Chanchala.



"O Devi, I don't have a chunk of marble here," said Viraj. "I did not bring my implements either," he added.

"Here it is!" was Chanchala's response. Viraj was amazed to find a block of marble

near him. He also saw a casket full of the necessary implements.

Viraj at once began his work. But Chanchala observed: "This is too slow a process. Wait, I'll give speed to your instruments."

Next moment Viraj saw himself working ten times faster. The figure was made in no time.

"Excellent!" exclaimed the two Yakshis. "Come here on the next full-moon night and fulfil your promise to us."

"I shall, O Devis, but how am I to carry this stone sculpture to the palace of King Sasankadev," said Viraj.

"Shut your eyes," commanded Chanchala.

Viraj did so — and felt a strange sensation. As if he was being carried through the sky.

When he opened his eyes, he saw himself right in front of the palace, along with the sculpture.

The king was duly informed of his presence. The image was taken inside. It was found to be an exact portrayal of the princess. "Am I looking at a mirror?" exclaimed the happy princess.

The king called Viraj to his presence and praised his work. He said: "We will make you the chief sculptor of our kingdom and a courtier. But, before that, you have to carve another image — of my wife's younger sister, Manjula. She has seen my daughter's image and wishes to have one made of herself."

"Your Majesty, can a subject ever disobey his king? But allow me to go home now. I feel tired, and I need some rest," said Viraj.

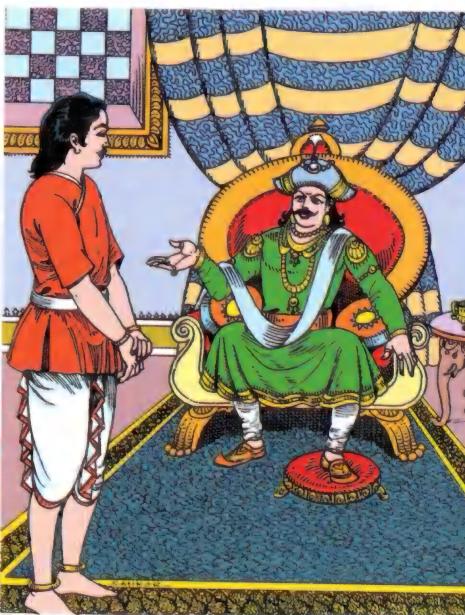
"All right," agreed the king, certain that Viraj would oblige him later.

But Viraj never returned to the palace. Not only that. He left the kingdom and went away to the neighbouring kingdom of Vajrapur. His parents also joined him.

The Vetal paused for a moment and then in a voice that was challenging, demanded of King Vikram, "O King, wasn't it foolish of Viraj to reject the position offered by the king? Just as he made the image of the princess, he could have made one of Manjula's, too. Why didn't he do that? Why did he go away to another country, Vajrapur, instead of enjoying his own king's patronage? Did he not promise the king to carve Manjula's figure? O King, answer me if you can. Should you keep

mum though you may know the answers, your head would roll off your neck!"

Answered King Vikram without the least delay: "An artist's greatest hope is an art-lover's sympathy and wisdom. King Sasankadev was a fool to expect that



somebody could carve an image of his daughter without taking a look at her. It was double foolishness on his part not to show any curiosity regarding Viraj's surprising achievement. How could Viraj make an

exact image of his daughter without ever seeing her? This question should become uppermost in one's mind unless one is blunt and dull. Viraj understood the attitude of the king. If the king ordered to create another image like the one he had done of the princess, even before appointing him as the chief sculptor, he could give similar orders time and again even after giving him the position. Must he run every time to the Yakshis to perform his task? Viraj never promised anything to King Sasankadev. He said that a subject must obey his king. That is why he did not wish to remain his subject and decided to leave Chakravak.

"The King of Vajrapur was a lover and patron of art. That explains why Viraj migrated to that kingdom. It is far better to be recognised as a good artist by people who understood art than to be recognised as the best artist by one who did not understand art."

No sooner had King Vikram concluded his answer than the vampire, along with the corpse, gave him the slip.

The Short-tempered Ascetic

PUBLISHED
IN 2005

It was a dark, moonless night. Occasional flashes of lightning lit up the sombre scene, causing an eerie dance of jerky and frightening shadows in the cremation ground. Occasionally, the spine-chilling howl of a jackal or the blood-curdling laughter of some unseen evil spirit cut into the silence that hung, shroud-like, over the area. Altogether, it was a scene that would strike terror into the bravest heart. But nothing could daunt the intrepid King Vikram. Once again, he made his way to the ancient gnarled tree from which the corpse hung. Bones crunched under his feet and a screeching ghost rose from the dust in shuddering frenzy as he marched ahead.

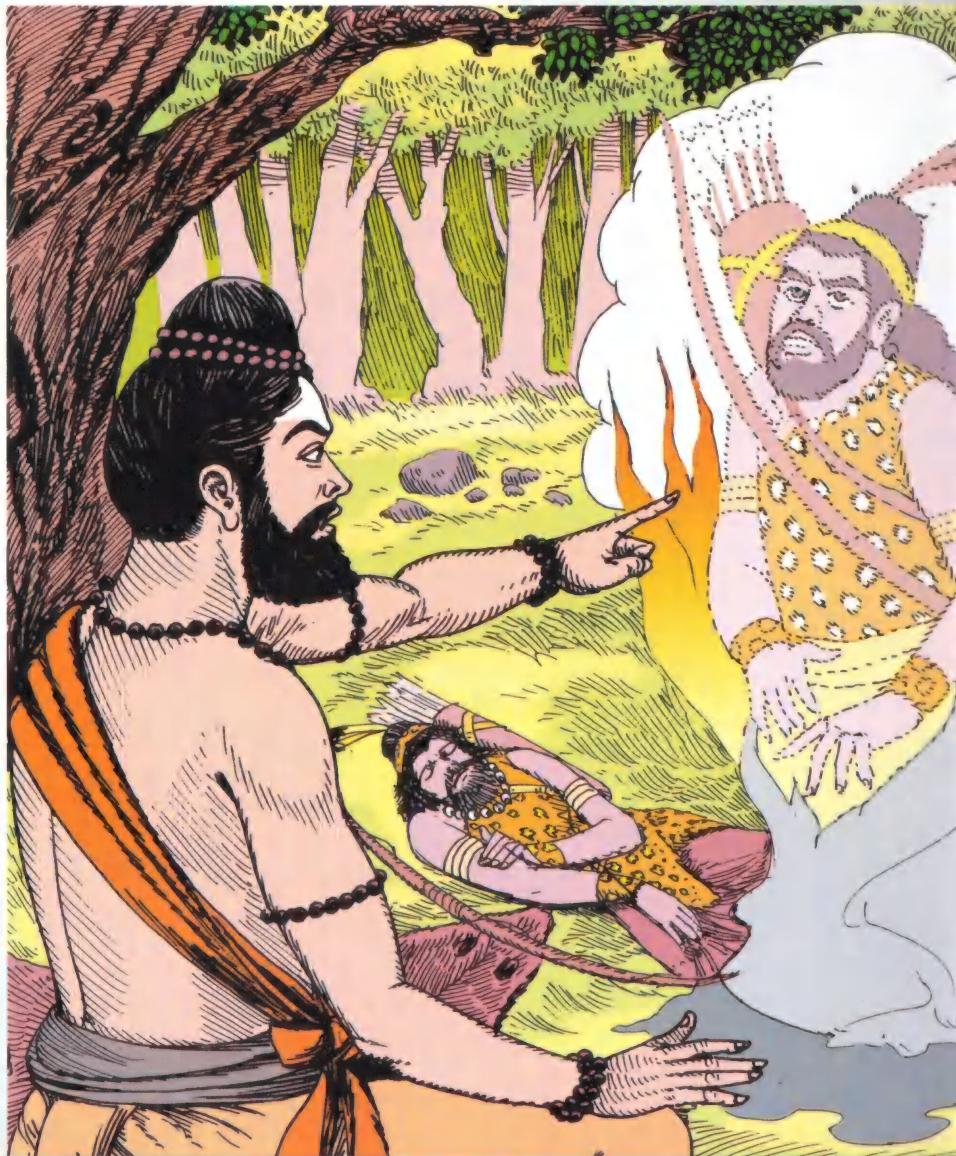
Oblivious to all this, he reached the tree and brought down the corpse. Slinging it over his shoulder, he had just begun his return journey when the vampire that possessed the corpse said, "O King, you

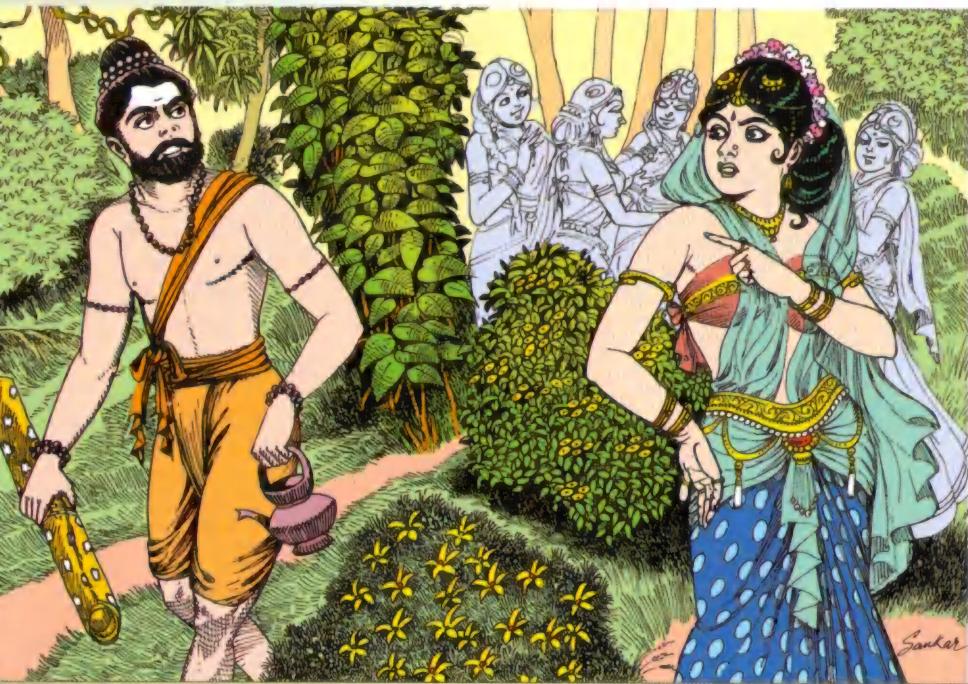
have been labouring tirelessly for a very long time. Perhaps it is your guru who has set you on this pursuit. But some wise gurus have a habit of couching their advice in ambiguous words, so that their real meaning remains an enigma! Perhaps your guru, too, is one such. The story of Sage Sutivra is an example."

The story narrated by the Vetala went as follows:

Once upon a time, an ascetic named Sutivra was sitting in a trance in the forest, when two tribal hunters came there. Exhausted by the long hunt, one of them fell down in a swoon. The other, in panic, ran to the ascetic and requested him for water to revive his friend. Finding him unresponsive, he shook him and roused him from his trance.

Overcome by fury at having been disturbed, Sutivra administered a curse on





the hunter, which instantly reduced him to a pile of ashes. Moments later, when the other hunter came back to his senses and found out what had happened, he pleaded with the ascetic to revoke his curse and restore his friend to life. Sutivra, who by now was feeling ashamed of his fit of temper, replied, "I can only curse, but don't have the power to revoke my curses. Let me go to my guru and ask him how your friend may be revived. Meanwhile, please stand guard over his ashes."

After a long journey, Sutivra reached the ashram of his guru, Sushanta, and told him the whole story. Sushanta said, "My boy, anger is man's greatest enemy. Your anger is undoing the effect of your penance; you would do well to rein it in. The hunter will be restored to life if you surrender the fruits of your penance."

Finding this a painful alternative, Sutivra asked his guru if there was no other way out. Sushanta answered, "In Vishnupur lives a householder named Madhav. If he gives you a part of his *punya* (merit accrued from good deeds or penance), the hunter will come back to life. You may go and meet him."

Sutivra immediately set out for Vishnupur. On the way, he came across a group of young girls. Among them was one so beautiful that he could not help staring at her. The girl chided him, "You're an ascetic, but instead of thinking of God, you're feasting your eyes on my beauty! Have you no shame?"

Stung by the rebuke, Sutivra instantly retorted, "So proud of your beauty, are you? May you turn into an ugly woman!"

The next moment, his curse came true, as the beautiful damsels turned into

an unsightly lass. Weeping bitterly, she ran away.

Sutivra continued on his journey and soon reached Vishnupur, where he asked a passing youth to show him the way to Madhav's house. But instead of complying, the youth sarcastically said, "So, despite being an ascetic, you have an eye on Madhav's beautiful daughter, do you? But let me warn you that I'm in love with her; if you try any tricks, I won't hesitate to kill you!"

When he heard this, Sutivra was so furious that he shouted, "Become dumb, you insolent fellow!" He then walked away in a huff. Behind him, the youth gesticulated wildly, discovering that he had suddenly become incapable of speech.

Finally, Sutivra reached Madhav's house, where he found Madhav sitting on the verandah. He walked up to him and introduced himself as a disciple of Sage Sushanta, whereupon Madhav welcomed him cordially and, after offering him a seat, enquired after his guru's welfare.

Sutivra could not find any fault with Madhav's hospitality. But he soon wondered, 'This man seems just like any other householder; what is so special about

him that my guru sent me to obtain *punya* from him?" Impelled by curiosity, he asked Madhav what he did and how he spent his time. Was he in the habit of doing penance or performing any special rituals?

Madhav replied, "Well, I wake up early in the morning, take my bath and busy myself with chores in and around the house. As and when possible, I help others in need. When I have free time, I read some good books. I sleep on time. I eschew anger and extreme emotions."

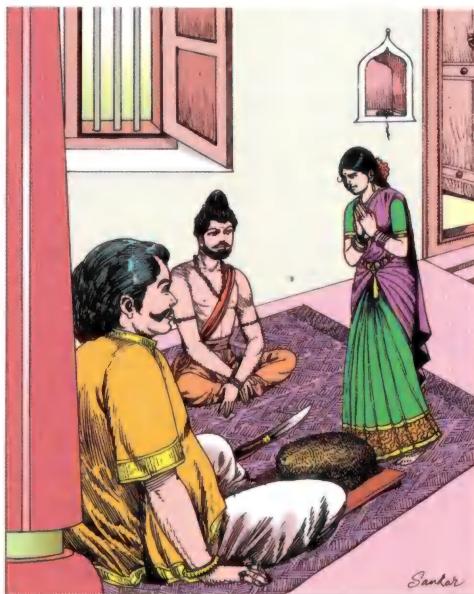
Sutivra was astonished to note that Madhav's daily routine did not include prayer or meditation. He enquired, "Don't you pray to God at least once a day?"

"Is there any place where God does not dwell? Why then should I pray to God who, after all, lives in me and in others like me? Helping others and living happily is as good as any prayer or ritual."

Sutivra was furious. "You're mocking me! Are you saying that the penance I have been doing all these years is useless?"

Madhav calmly replied, "O holy man, I was speaking of myself. I did not say anything about you. My personal belief is that doing penance is a waste of time."

When he heard this, Sutivra's temper got the better of him and, as was his wont, without pausing to think he shouted, "Atheists like you must be punished! This very moment, may your limbs get paralysed and may you lose your eyesight!"



Wonder of wonders! Sutivra's curses had no effect on Madhav whatsoever. In the same calm voice, he said, "O great soul, you're an ascetic. It was wrong on my part to provoke you to anger, and I apologise. Please calm down. Tell me, is

it fair to expect someone to change his long-held views so suddenly?" Sutivra was dumbstruck. Finding his tongue with difficulty, he at last said in a voice choked with pain, "My curse did not affect you. Obviously you're a greater soul than I!"

Madhav humbly replied, "No, O sage! You use the power you obtained by penance to punish people who do wrong. But each time you do this, you lose a bit of your power. By your power, you burnt a hunter to ashes, destroyed a girl's beauty, and made a young man dumb. With this, you exhausted your power. Now let me ask you – haven't you come here to ask me to donate my punya so that the people you cursed may be liberated from the curses? Until they are back to normal, your curse would not affect me. I grant it. Now you have also regained your power – you may curse me if you like!"

Sutivra did not curse Madhav. He bowed to him and silently walked away. On his way back, he saw that all the people he had cursed had been restored to their original forms. He returned to his guru, told him all that had happened and asked him for an explanation.

Sushanta explained, "No doubt the power obtained from doing penance is



great. But a disciplined man who lives in harmony with nature, discharging his duties and helping others, is more powerful than a short-tempered ascetic like you. He also has more punya, since he is unable to curse others and cause them harm."

Sutivra asked, "But Madhav donated his punya to free those whom I cursed; so hasn't he lost it now? How long will it take for him to get it back?"

Sushanta smilingly replied, "It is the biggest good deed to donate the merit of one's good deeds to right another's mistake. So, thanks to you, Madhav's punya, because of this unselfish good deed, has redoubled instead of diminishing; and for making him do such a thing, your burden of sin has also increased!"

Hearing this, Sutivra turned pale. After a moment's thought he got up, saying, "Guruji! Let me now go back to my penance to recover my lost power and to free myself from the burden of my sin."

Concluding the story at this point, the vampire demanded, "O King! Sushanta's explanation hints at the fruitlessness of penance as a method of winning God's favour. Wasn't that why he sent his ascetic disciple Sutivra to the householder Madhav for help? Why then did Sutivra ultimately

return to his routine of penance? Instead of talking ambiguously, why didn't Sushanta advise his disciple clearly to give up his penance and lead a householder's life? If you choose to keep quiet despite knowing the answers, your head shall shatter into a thousand pieces!"

The king replied, "Sutivra's fault was that he was governed by his temper. Such men are fit for neither an ascetic's life nor a householder's life. After hearing from Sutivra of the way in which he had behaved with Madhav, Sushanta could not advise him to lead a householder's life. That is why he merely threw out some hints, but left the onus of taking a decision on his disciple's shoulders. The erstwhile arrogant and short-tempered Sutivra too had learnt his lesson and decided to turn over a new leaf. That is why he resolved to return to the forest and become a good ascetic."

No sooner had the king finished speaking than the vampire, along with the corpse, moved off his shoulder with a jerk and flew back to the tree. King Vikram immediately drew his sword and went after the vampire. He squared his shoulders and retraced his steps towards the tree. His dogged determination was very much evident in his steady gait.

The King and His General

Dark was the night and eerie the atmosphere. The howls of jackals were subdued by the weird shrieks of the ghosts. It rained from time to time. Flashes of lightning revealed fearful faces.

But King Vikram did not swerve. He climbed the ancient tree again and brought the corpse down. As soon as he began crossing the desolate cremation ground with the corpse lying astride on his shoulder, the vampire that possessed the corpse spoke: "O King, at times even the conduct of a sensible man will appear queer. It seems there is nothing that some people cannot do to satisfy their selfish ends. Let me give you an instance. Listen to it attentively. That might bring you some relief."

The vampire went on: "Long long ago, the kingdom of Amaravati was ruled by Navinsen. But he fell sick. That is why Lalgupta, the commander of the king's army, was made to sit on the throne and rule the land. But after the death of both

Navinsen and Lalgupta, King Navinsen's son Chandrasen ascended the throne.

This disappointed Lalgupta's son Virgupta. He tried to kill Chandrasen, but did not succeed. His motive became known. However, instead of punishing him, Chandrasen said, "Look, my dear friend, you love the throne. I love to study. I suggest that you rule the kingdom for five years. Let me spend that period in Varanasi, devoting myself to gathering knowledge. But you must promise to rule in peace and restore the kingdom to me on my return."

"Thank you, O noble prince. I promise to rule peacefully and restore the kingdom to you on your return," said Virgupta. Chandrasen left for Varanasi. Virgupta became the king.

The king of Mohanpur had a daughter named Manimala. She was both beautiful and gifted. Her father arranged for her *Swayamvara*. Invitations were sent to a number of princes.

Unfortunately, Virgupta did not receive any invitation. He was annoyed. "Why has Mohanpur ignored me?" he asked his minister.

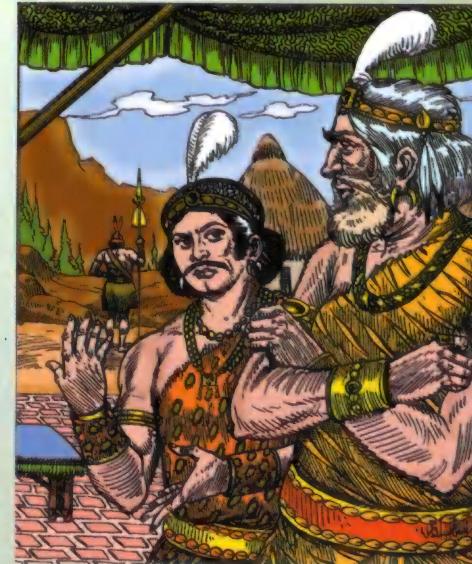
"My lord, the King of Mohanpur desires his daughter to be a queen. He knows very well that your tenure as king will last only a few more years. Why then should he invite you?" replied the minister.

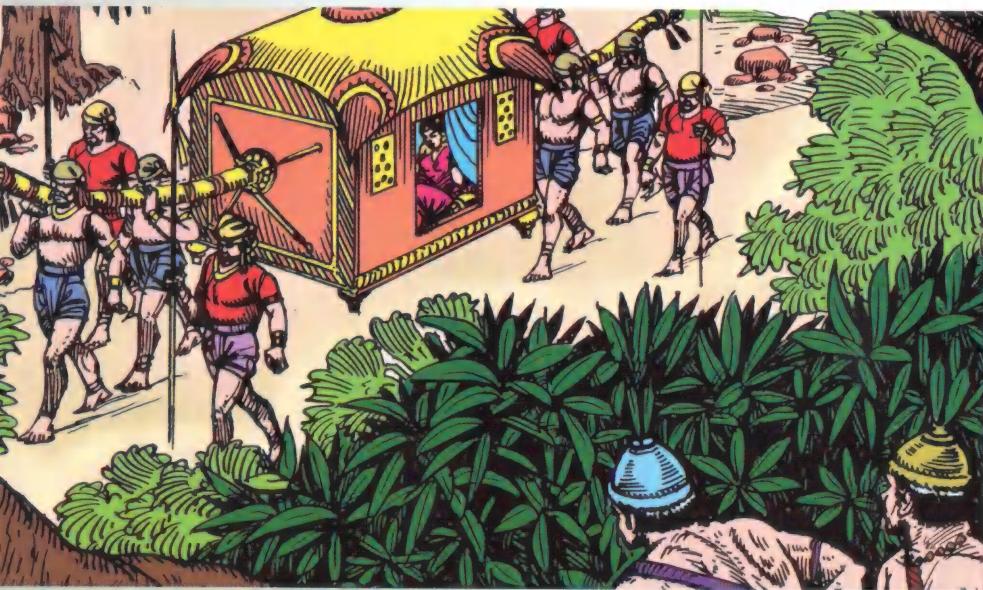
"I shall teach him a lesson. Prepare our army. I shall march against Mohanpur," said Virgupta angrily.

"My lord, please do not forget the fact that you have promised to rule peacefully," reminded the minister.

But Virgupta paid no heed to the minister's advice. He sent a messenger to the court of Mohanpur along with his picture and a message that he ought to be invited for the *Swayamvara*. Otherwise he would attack and destroy Mohanpur.

The King of Mohanpur flung Virgupta's picture away and tore his letter to





pieces. Virgupta's emissary returned to his master, humiliated.

Virgupta declared war against Mohanpur.

The King of Mohanpur sent messengers to the princes who had been earlier invited by him, saying that the one who would behead Virgupta would marry Manimala.

Several princes headed towards Amaravati with their armies, each one eager to behead Virgupta.

Spies carried the news of the impending attack on Amaravati to Prince

Chandrasen at Varanasi. He at once set out for Amaravati. He climbed to the top of the castle and observed how hordes of soldiers were heading towards his castle from different directions, led by various princes.

Virgupta too came up and had a view of the invading armies. He was trembling with fear.

As soon as the invading princes reached the castle wall, Prince Chandrasen struck Virgupta with his sword. Virgupta's head rolled down from the roof.

When the princes saw that Virgupta had already been beheaded by someone, they went away.

Chandrasen produced Virgupta's head before the King of Mohanpur. Needless to say, he married Princess Manimala.

The vampire paused and, in a challenging voice, demanded of King Vikram, "O King, was it not treacherous of Chandrasen to kill Virgupta? How could a man who had been so sympathetic towards Virgupta earlier, behave in such a manner? Had his desire to marry Manimala turned him mad? Answer me, O king, if you can. Should you keep mum though you may know the answer, your head would roll off your shoulders."

King Vikram answered forthwith: "Before we judge Chandrasen, we must judge Virgupta's conduct. The fact that Virgupta had once tried to kill Chandrasen must not be forgotten. Chandrasen had not only forgiven Virgupta, but granted him a rare privilege—kingship for five years!"

"Virgupta had promised to rule peacefully. He broke his promise when he declared war on Mohanpur. Since he insisted on marrying Princess Manimala, it was obvious that he had decided to cling to the throne.

"We see that Virgupta had always conducted himself treacherously. He deserved death right at the beginning when he tried to kill Chandrasen. If Chandrasen killed him at last, it was not due to any personal grievance, but to protect his kingdom. An attack by so many princes would have ruined Amaravati totally. Virgupta, in any case, would have lost his head to one of the princes. Chandrasen did only what any intelligent prince would have done in such a grave situation."

No sooner had the king finished replying than the vampire, along with the corpse, gave him the slip. King Vikram drew his sword and went after the vampire.

The Demon's Dilemma

Dark was the night and weird the atmosphere. It rained from time to time; gusts of wind shook the trees; between thunderclaps and the moaning of jackals could be heard the eerie laughter of spirits. Flashes of lightning revealed fearsome faces.

But King Vikram swerved not. He climbed the ancient tree once again and brought down the corpse. However, as soon as he began crossing the desolate cremation ground, with the corpse lying on his shoulder, the Vetala that possessed the corpse spoke: "O King! You seem to be making untiring efforts, without respite. What do you wish to achieve? I pity you. Instead of enjoying a comfortable sleep on your cosy bed, you continue to pursue me. Why don't you give up this exercise? Are you sure that you are observing your royal duties? Are you true to your legitimate function? If not, you may repeat the kind of blunder that the demon Deerghabahu committed. Let me tell you what happened to him. Pay attention to my narration. That should relax you."

PUBLISHED
IN 2000

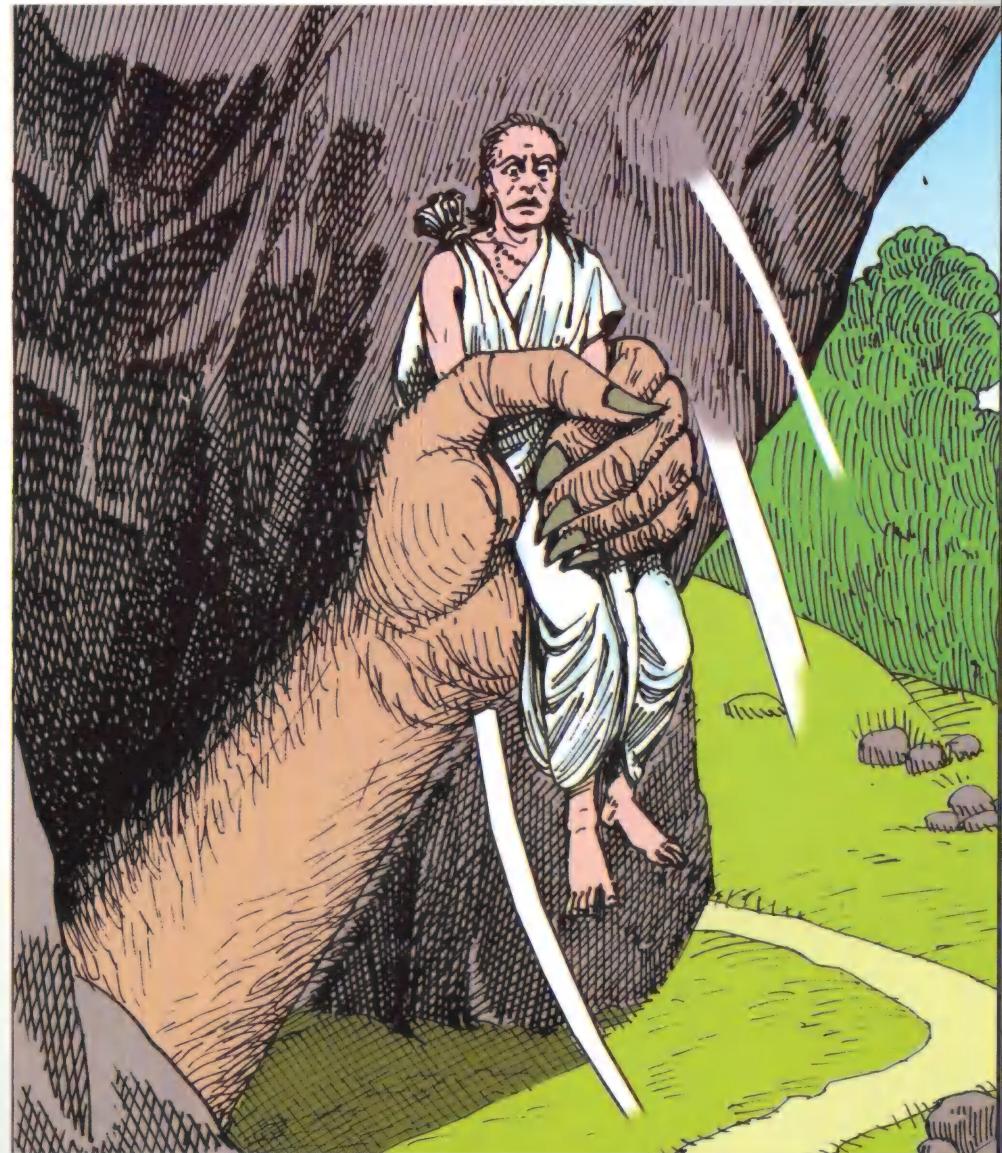
The Vetala went on:

Once upon a time there lived an old pundit named Sankara Sastri in the kingdom of Kunthala. One day he performed a rite at a rich man's house in a far off village and began his homeward journey.

In order to reach home soon, he took a short cut through a forest. He reached a place dense with tall trees and hillocks. Suddenly from a cave, a demon stretched his hand and grabbed Sankara Sastri in his fist and lifted him up.

A terribly shaken Shastri looked down and saw the demon's mouth open like a miniature cave and his teeth like two rows of sharp knives,

"Oye! What a dismal small dish! You will only increase my appetite. However, now that I'm hungry after a long sleep, probably for a week, I must eat you before going out in search of better food," observed the demon.



Sankara Shastri was a courageous man. Once the demon had started talking to him, he decided to use the situation to his advantage. He must at least try, he thought.

"O great demon, you are not only mighty but also capable of miracles! How otherwise could you have lifted me up from the road yonder, while sitting in front of your cave? Neither gods nor men could do this!" he said.

"Right!" commented the pleased demon. "Not that every demon could do this. I am gifted with very long arms. That is why my parents named me Deerghabahu—the long-armed. Look here!"

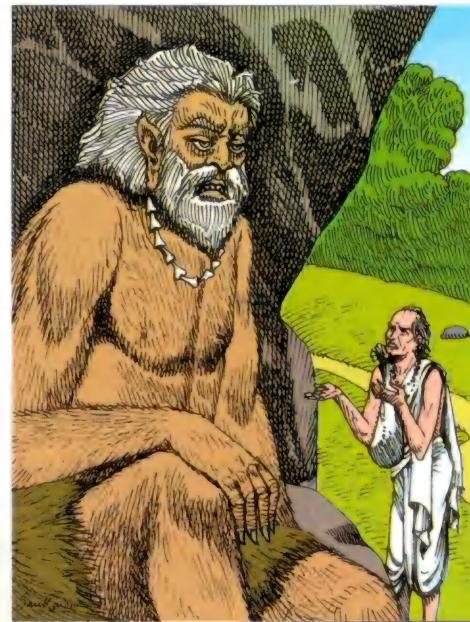
The demon stretched his right hand and plucked a palm-fruit from a tree in front of his cave.

"Marvellous!" exclaimed Sankara Shastri. "I am happy to be of some service to you as your appetiser. But, by the way, do you know how you were gifted with such arms which, I believe, are unusual even for demons?"

"I don't know. But do you know anything about that?" asked the demon, rather surprised.

"I have to know, for that is my profession. I am an astrologer of a very special kind. I can know the past and the future of a person. By past I mean even one's past life," answered Shastri.

"I've never eaten an astrologer, I must confess. I don't know how you'll taste. But



before I eat you, will you please disclose to me the mystery of my long arms?" asked the demon.

"You see, you were a human being in your previous life. Not only that, you were the disciple of a sage and you could learn the lessons taught by him faster than his other disciples. But you had one weakness – only one ..."

"What was that?"

"Must I tell you? I hope you'll pardon me. You had the habit of stealing things from other disciples or visitors who came to meet the sage. You acted very swiftly, as if you could thrust your hand into every nook and corner. At last one day when you stole some laddoos that someone had offered to your guru, he cursed you saying that in your next life you'll have very long arms. But since no human being can have arms beyond a certain size, you'll be born as a demon."

Shastri paused. The demon who heard him with rapt attention, asked, "Can you tell me where the guru is? I'll throttle him with my long arms!"

Shastri laughed. "Your guru is beyond your arms. He is in heaven. But don't get angry with him. When you repented, the guru also gave you a boon. He said that your demonhood and those very long arms of yours can make you the king of the land."

"Is that so?" The demon was amazed.

"It is so. And, once you become the king, you can eat to your heart's content most delicious dishes!"

"A human being is the most delicious dish. I would like to eat three human beings a day. Will my subjects bear with me?" asked the curious demon.

"Gladly. The kingdom is overpopulated. They will be happy if their king brings down the population in a healthy way, that is to say - by himself growing more and more healthy!"

"Good. Now, how to become the king? The king is alive."

"Once you march into the capital, the king shall flee, leaving his throne for you."

"Very well. Please lead me to the right place."

The demon set out on his journey to the capital, led by Sankara Shastri.

As soon as they crossed the forest and reached the locality, Sankara Shastri merrily clapped and sang.

"What's the matter with you? Why are you so jubilant?" asked the demon.

"You see, I was afraid of wild animals as long as I was in the forest. Now I am

happy because I am out of their reach," replied Shastri.

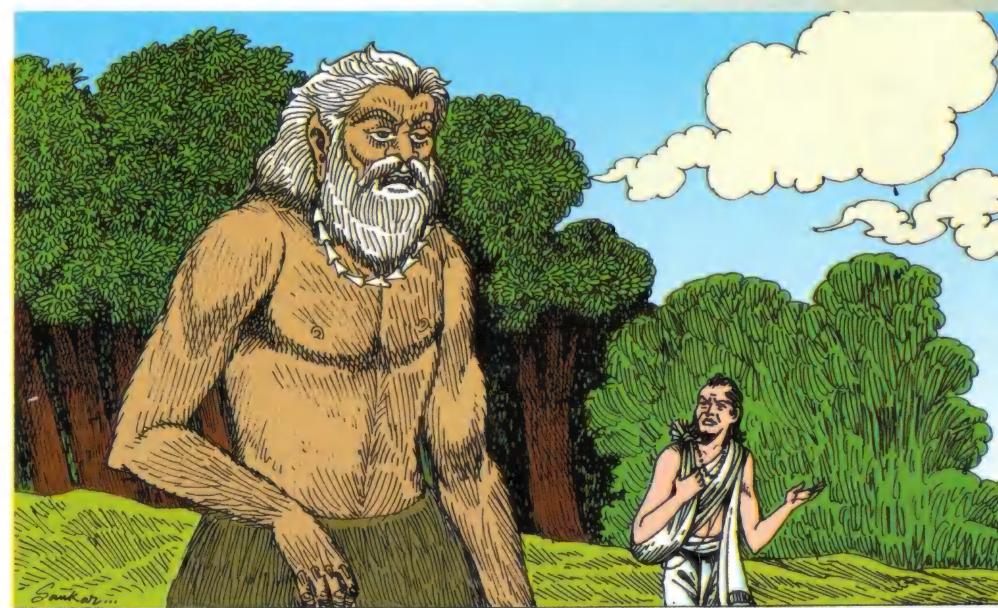
"Don't wild animals come to the locality? Why?"

"They don't. They live in the forest just as human beings live in the locality. A tiger or a leopard can kill a man when a man enters a forest. Similarly, a tiger or a leopard is likely to get killed once it enters the locality. Each creature should be where he belongs. The fish live in the water; the birds live on the trees, the wild animals in the forest, the human beings in villages and towns. This is the rule made by nature," explained Shastri. "A wild animal must be confined to the forest. That is *Pashudharma*—the rule for the animals," added.

They walked silently for a while, along the bank of a river. There was a Gurukul to their right. Some of the students were practising archery; some others were wrestling; some more were reciting hymns or singing.

The demon observed them for a while and asked, "What is this?"

"This is a school. A great sage runs it. Among his students there are several



princes. They are learning archery and wrestling."

While Shastri was speaking, the guru was seen coming out of a hut. A prince kept down his bow and prostrated himself before the guru.

"Must a prince become so very humble?" asked the demon.

"Yes. One must be humble before his guru. In fact, there is nothing which a student cannot sacrifice at the guru's asking," said Shastri.



"Why then does the guru not ask for the kingdom? He could become the king!" asked the demon.

"To make a prince a worthy king is the guru's duty. The guru is conscious of his *gurudharma*-duty as a teacher. He will never like to do a thing that is against his dharma. The human world is so well organised because the sense of duty rules the life of man. God has made man cleverer and wiser than all other creatures so that they will lead a good life. That is *Manavadharma*—the law of human conduct."

Shastri had just concluded his explanation when the demon turned and walked towards the forest with long strides. Next moment, he was out of Shastri's sight.

Shastri laughed and walked towards his home, which was not far.

The Vetal stopped, and raising the pitch of his voice, demanded of King Vikram, "O King, what happened to the demon who was so eager to become the king? Why did he retreat? Was it because he was afraid of the human locality? Was it because he felt that he

had been tricked by Shastri and was annoyed with him? Why did he not gobble up Shastri before retreating into the forest? Answer me if you can, O King. Should you keep mum despite your ability to answer, your head would roll off your neck!"

Forthwith answered King Vikram. "The demon was neither afraid of anybody nor annoyed with Shastri. Although he was a demon, he had enough sense to understand that if Shastri had tricked him for saving himself, he had done so because man was cleverer than other creatures. But what made the demon wiser was the lesson Shastri gave him about the different dharmas or duties of different creatures.

If the animals behaved according to Pashudharma and men in general did so according to Manavadharma and the guru according to Gurudharma, he should also act according to Danavadharma or the conduct natural to a demon. He could eat a human being in the forest, but not in the locality. It was not for a demon to become a king over human beings. The forest was his home and not the palace. He retreated because he woke up to this truth."

No sooner had the king concluded his answer than the Vetal, along with the corpse, gave him the slip.

The Unexpected Choice

The cremation ground presented an eerie spectacle that dark night. The moon was hidden behind the clouds, and it was drizzling intermittently. The pitch darkness was relieved only by occasional flashes of lightning that lit up the sombre scene, causing an eerie dance of jerky shadows in the cremation ground. Occasionally, a jackal's spine-chilling howl or the blood-curdling laughter of some invisible evil spirit cut into the silence that hung like a shroud over the area. Altogether, it was a scene that would strike terror into the bravest of hearts. But nothing could daunt the intrepid King Vikram. Once again, he made his way to the ancient gnarled tree from which the corpse was hanging. Bones crunched under his feet, and a screeching ghost rose from the dust in shuddering frenzy as he marched determinedly ahead.

Oblivious to everything but the mission at hand, he brought the hanging corpse down by cutting the rope with his sword. Slinging it astride his shoulder, he

had just begun his return journey when the vampire that possessed the corpse said, "O King! From the way you are persevering in this difficult and dangerous task, it is evident that you are a dedicated monarch whose greatest concern is the welfare of his subjects. But I have seen that occasionally, even sincere kings like yourself throw their principles to the winds when a question of their self-aggrandisement arises. Let me tell you the story of one such person, and you can judge for yourself."

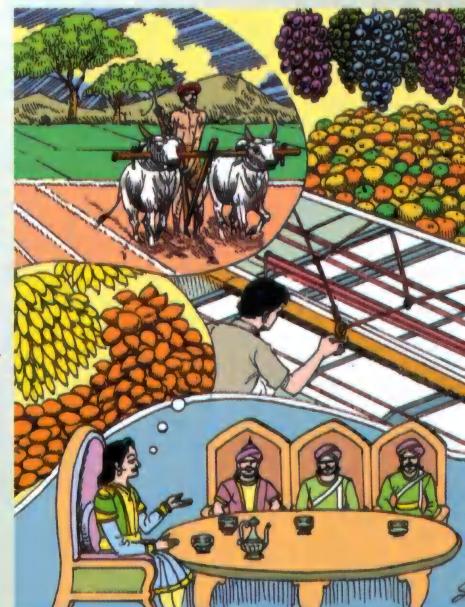
The tale the vampire narrated went as follows.

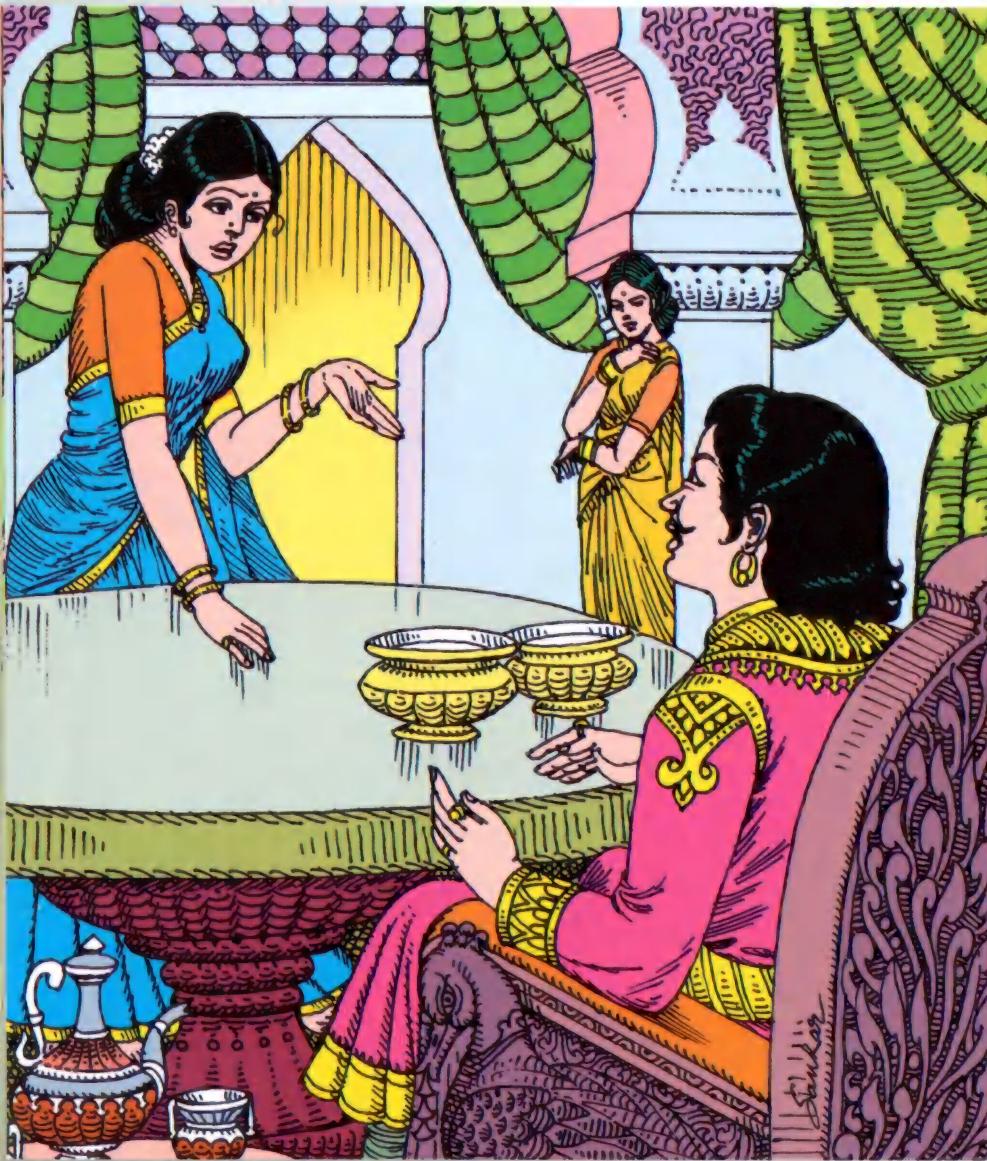
Vir was the only son of the King of Vajrapur. Right from his childhood, he had been deeply interested in the task of administration. By the time he grew to manhood, he had become an expert in the martial arts and the art of administration. He was wise beyond his years, and the king frequently consulted him on tricky administrative issues. Before long, the king crowned him his successor and went into

retirement, content in the belief that the kingdom was safe in his son's hands.

King Vir did not belie his father's faith in him. He worked untiringly for the progress and prosperity of the kingdom. Various welfare schemes were launched. Farmers were encouraged to try out new crops, and small-scale entrepreneurs were provided with assistance. Convicts in prison were given vocational training to make them self-reliant and transform them into useful members of society. Only three years after Vir had ascended the throne, he had managed to change the very face of Vajrapur, turning it into a highly prosperous kingdom.

It was now time for the king to think of taking a wife. Contrary to the usual practice of choosing a bride from a royal family, he decided that he would marry a commoner – one who was well-educated and highly intelligent, who could help him in the task of administration and empathise with the joys and sorrows of his subjects.





To find such a woman, he decided to hold a series of tests, which would be open for participation to all the maidens of the kingdom. He announced he would wed whoever wins in the tests.

The announcement received an enthusiastic response from numerous young ladies who dreamt of becoming the queen of Vajrapur. The tests were formulated to assess the resourcefulness, problem-solving abilities, and memory skills of the contestants. At the end, two young women who had topped in all the rounds were shortlisted for a final round of tests. Their names were Devayani and Shivani.

The responsibility of choosing the final winner went to King Vir. He summoned the two women and said, "I understand that you both are highly intelligent and capable young women. I now have one more task for you. You must capture the warrior who has tamed seven horses and bring him to me. Whoever succeeds in this task will be the winner and my queen."

Both women thought for a moment. Almost simultaneously, their eyes went to some bowls kept on the table. Each took a bowl and went away. Moments later, they returned simultaneously and placed their bowls, now filled with water, on the

table before the king. As the king looked into the two bowls one after the other, he could see in the water the reflection of the morning sun, shining in through the open window. Both the women had successfully interpreted the riddle and answered his challenge. The warrior who tamed seven horses was the sun, who is believed to ride a chariot drawn by seven horses.

Now that the contest had ended in a draw, the king was in a dilemma. At last, he said, "I would like to know about your backgrounds. Please tell me about your families and where you come from."

He turned to Shivani, who answered without any hesitation, "I hail from Rampur village, which is to the east of the capital. My parents, Kishanchand and Padma, are farmers."

The king then turned to Devayani. She flared up, "What does it matter who my parents are, or where I come from? If you want to assess my calibre, you must do so by conducting another test—not by going into my family background."

The king looked suspiciously at her and said, "You are secretive about your family background. It seems that you have something to hide. You would do well to be frank."

"Yes, I do have something to hide!" snapped Devayani. "I am not a commoner, but a princess, heir to the throne of Kosala. I have been in love with you for long and wish to marry you. On learning that you intended to marry a common girl and that you were conducting a contest to choose your bride, I came here and took part in the contest in the guise of a commoner – all to win your hand. Was it such a crime?"

For a moment, the king was dumbfounded. Then, in a mild voice he asked, "You knew that the contest was meant exclusively for commoners of this kingdom. So, as the crown-princess of the neighbouring kingdom, was it proper on your part to participate in it under a false identity?"

"I wanted to marry you and I have proved myself worthy of it by passing your tests. So, is it proper on your part to reject me only because I'm a princess? You have insulted me. You shall pay for this some day!" So saying, Princess Devayani stormed out of the king's chamber.

King Vir could only stare after her in bewilderment. After witnessing all this drama, the other contestant Shivani withdrew quietly, and returned to her village.

Vir had never met Princess Devayani before, but he had heard quite a lot about her. She was the only child of Amarendra, the King of Kosala, and had been pampered by her doting father, as a result of which she was said to be haughty and self-willed. However, she was very intelligent and capable. It was she



who actually ruled the kingdom, as her father was easy-going, preferring to spend much of his time playing chess.

On reaching home, Devayani went straight to her father. Amid tears, she poured out the whole tale to him.

After hearing her story, King Amarendra was in a dilemma. Kosala was a bigger and stronger kingdom than Vajrapur and it was not difficult for him to attack and annex it. But he did not wish to do this.

After some thought, he composed a letter to Vir, which he sent through his trusted minister. Vir received the envoy courteously and went through the letter. It read: "Greetings to King Vir of Vajrapur. My daughter did wrong in going against the rules of your competition, and I apologise on her behalf. It was her love for you that made her stoop to such a level. As a father who desires the welfare of his daughter, I request you to marry her. If you do, the kingdom of Kosala will become yours. Since I know you to be a righteous and intelligent king, I can then rest easy about the welfare of my kingdom as well as my daughter."

On reading this, Vir was lost in thought for some time. Then, he sent a reply through the envoy, accepting the proposal. Soon afterwards, Vir and Devayani were married. Vir became the ruler of both kingdoms.

Concluding the story at this point, the vampire demanded, "O King! Vir pretended to be a man of great integrity,



but had no compunctions about casting his principles to the winds when an attractive offer came up. He had announced that he would marry only a commoner. So, wasn't it wrong on his part to reject the commoner Shivani and marry Devayani who had actually flouted the rules of the contest? Was it his desire to annex Kosala that prompted him to take this decision, or was it motivated by a fear of reprisal from Kosala's powerful army? If you know the answer to my question, speak out – otherwise, your head shall shatter into smithereens!"

Calmly and without hesitation, King Vikram replied, "It was neither fear nor greed that motivated Vir to act the way he did. He was a king who was fully conscious of his responsibility towards his subjects, and who worked day and night to improve their lot. Selfish considerations had no place in his mind. He was aware of how the people of Kosala were suffering under the reign of an irresponsible king and an efficient but temperamental princess.

"If he became their king, he could do a lot of good for them. Although he was not in love with Devayani, he realised that since she loved him, he could certainly count

on her help in all aspects if he married her. Thus, it was a well-considered decision guided entirely by altruistic motives."

On hearing this, the vampire nodded in approval, before going off into peal after peal of thunderous laughter. The next moment he, along with the corpse, moved off the king's shoulder with a jerk and flew back to the ancient tree. King Vikram gave a little sigh as he gazed upon the scene. Then, he squared his shoulders and retraced his steps towards the tree.

BY THE WAY

Of the original 25 stories in the *Vetala Panchvimshati*, only a few have been used by *Chandamama* in this series due to their suitability.

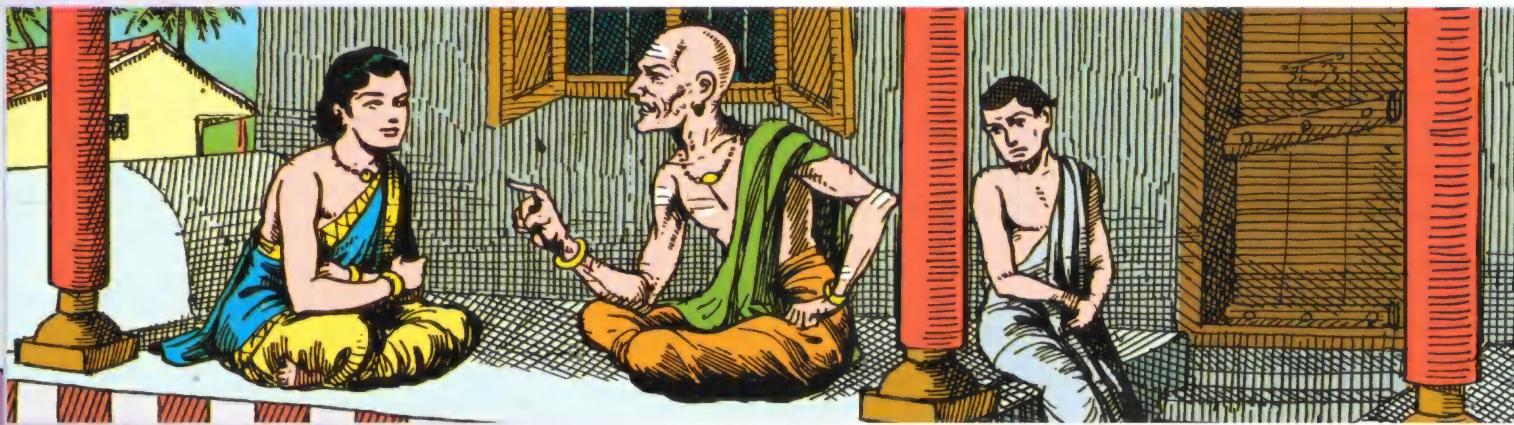
Adventures and Explorations





Adventures and Explorations

Some of these stories appearing in *Chandamama* are true stories taken from real life. The stories of adventure inspire the readers to face hurdles and danger and ultimately overcome them with determination and hope.



PUBLISHED
IN 1957

The Scholar

Knce there was a Brahmin youth in Banaras, Kuchu-mara by name. He was a great scholar, a master of all the sixty-four sciences. Those were the days when King Bhoja of Dhara was patronising poets and pandits and giving them fabulous gifts. Thinking of obtaining favours from the great king, Kuchu-mara started for the city of Dhara.

On his way he stopped at a Brahman village. One of the householders of the village gave him food and shelter. When they sat for their meal, the host politely asked his guest, "Sir, may I know where you

hail from, whither you are bound, and on what errand?"

"Banaras is my native place," Kuchu-mara replied. "I am on my way to Dhara, seeking the patronage of King Bhoja."

"If you are a scholar," the host said, "you need not go all the way to Dhara. Our King has a daughter named Saraswati. She insists on marrying a man of learning equal to her own. The man who can meet her tests will not only marry her but he will also become the future King of our country."

Kuchu-mara said that he was ready to meet the tests devised by Princess Saraswati. Purandar, which was the capital of the country, was not very far from the village. The host sent his own son Shambara as Kuchu-mara's guide.

Kuchu-mara went to the court of the King, announced himself as having come to submit himself to the test of the Princess. The officials allotted quarters for him and passed on the details concerning him to the Princess.

On receiving information concerning Kuchu-mara, the Princess wrote him the following letter:

"Sir, since you are a Brahman I do not like to see you defeated. But you need not go away disappointed. I am sending you some gifts, which I want you to accept and give me your blessings."

The servant who took this letter to Kuchu-mara brought the gifts from the Princess, too. Kuchu-mara declined the gifts and asked Shambara to draft the following reply to the Princess:

"Madam, if you had any objections to marrying me, you could have said so frankly. But it was very unfair of you to try to send me off like this. The gifts are uncalled for,

since I would depart without them once you had defeated me."

The Princess read this reply and felt irritated. She sent some flowers to Kuchu-mara through her servants. Kuchu-mara understood that his knowledge of making garlands was being put to test. So he arranged the flowers in a very clever design in which his own name also figured.

Next, the Princess sent him a heap of precious stones some of which were real and others just fakes. Kuchu-mara was requested to estimate the value of the entire lot. He separated the real gems from the fakes, estimated the value of the real gems, powdered the fakes, made the powder into a packet and sent it back to the Princess along with the real gems and his estimation of their value.

Then some maids of the Princess brought a parrot that could not speak, and told Kuchu-mara, "The Princess requests you to teach the parrot to speak."

Making the parrots speak was one of the sciences and Kuchu-mara knew it. Within the space of twenty-four hours he taught the parrot speech and sent it back to the Princess.

Up till now the Princess had not seen Kuchu-mara. But now she desired to know

how he looked. So she asked the parrot to describe the person who taught him speech. To her surprise, the parrot told her that Kuchu-mara was a young and handsome man.

Soon it was known all over the royal precincts that the Princess was going to marry one Kuchu-mara who had stood her tests. But Shambara, Kuchu-mara's guide, guessed it when the parrot brought a diamond necklace as a gift from the Princess for Kuchu-mara.

Now Shambara was seized with a wicked idea. No one knew precisely who Kuchu-mara was. The Princess had never set eyes on him. The only letter she had from Kuchu-mara was written by Shambara. There was no likelihood of the Princess putting Kuchu-mara to further tests. What could prevent Shambara from announcing himself to be Kuchu-mara, marrying the Princess and getting the throne? So, that night, Shambara took a large stone and bashed Kuchu-mara's head while he was asleep, tied the same stone round his neck and dropped him into the moat outside the fort walls.

But, early next morning, trouble came to him in the shape of the parrot that brought a message from the Princess to Kuchu-mara. The parrot flew allover the lodge. Not finding him, it approached



Shambara and asked him, "Where is Kuchu-mara?"

"I am Kuchu-mara," he replied. "What do you want?"

"Don't be funny," said the parrot. "Tell me where he is. I bring a message to him from the Princess."

"Come near and I'll tell you where Kuchu-mara is," Shambara said, and when the parrot approached him trustingly, he caught it by the throat and threatened it saying, "I shall kill you if you don't deliver to





me the message of the Princess." The parrot refused to speak and Shambara strangled it to death. Saraswati became uneasy that her parrot did not return. She was also anxious for Kuchu-mara's reply. Finally she sent her maids to find out what had happened. They came and told Shambara that they wanted to speak to Kuchu-mara.

"I am Kuchu-mara," Shambara told them boldly.

"What happened to the parrot which our Princess sent to you?" they asked.

"It was very unfortunate," Shambara replied, "that the poor bird was caught by a big, bad cat!"

The shrewd maids returned to the Princess and told her, "Madam, we saw a crude fellow in the lodge who said that he was Kuchu-mara. He also said that your parrot was accidentally killed by a cat."

Since the Princess had heard from her parrot that Kuchu-mara was handsome, she too became suspicious. She wrote a verse in a rare script, gave it to her maids and asked them to bring back a reply from the one who was calling himself Kuchu-mara.

Shambara could not read the verse and got very angry. "I won't give a reply to

this," he shouted at the maids. "It is not fair that your mistress should trouble me eternally with her tests."

"There is no question of a test," the maids replied. "Our mistress does not want that others should know what she wrote to you. You can use a rare script for your reply if you so desire."

"I will not!" Shambara said. "I know it is a test. In case your mistress suspects that I am not Kuchu-mara but someone else, here is the necklace that she sent me."

This proved to the maids conclusively that the fellow was an impostor, since nobody had accused him of not being Kuchu-mara. The maids returned to the Princess and reported.

The Princess agreed with her maids, but she devised yet another test. She gave her maids another wild parrot and sent it to Shambara. The maids told him, "You refuse to reply to the messages written in a secret script. Will you kindly teach this parrot how to speak, so that it will serve as a messenger between the two of you?"

"Do you think I have nothing else to do but teach dumb parrots?" Shambara fumed. "Evidently your mistress has no intention of marrying me, and that is why she is trying to engage me in such tasks."

This reply of Shambara confirmed the worst suspicions of Princess Saraswati.

In the meantime, a strange thing happened.

Very near the capital there was a fishermen's village. The fishermen of this village had made a new net and asked their purohit to fix an auspicious time for using it. "Throw the net exactly at midnight tonight. It is the best time," the purohit had said.

The river was too far away. So the fishermen chose the moat. Also, the fishermen had heard that fresh water had been let into the moat recently. So, to the moat came the fishermen exactly at midnight and threw the new net. It was very heavy when they pulled it out. They were sure of a huge haul. But to their disappointment, it was a human body that was hauled up in the net.

The man was not dead. The body was still warm and the heart was still beating.

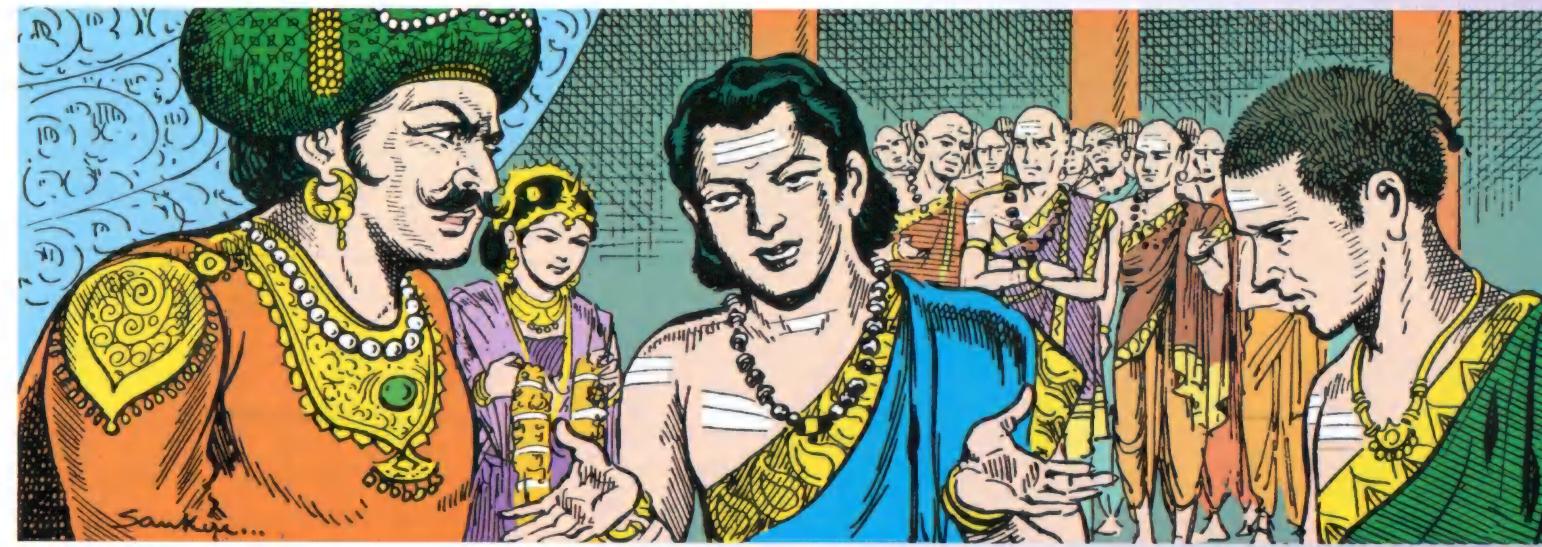
In short, it was Kuchu-mara. The fishermen had come to the moat only a few minutes after the wily Shambara had thrown him into it, and Kuchu-mara was thus saved from death.

Kuchu-mara was hastily conveyed to the village where his head was dressed. His

entire body was massaged and made warm. In a couple of days, Kuchu-mara was fit enough to move about. But he was ashamed to tell his rescuers who he was. He remained with the fishermen, followed them to the river everyday and helped them by plying the ferry across the river.

In the capital Shambara persisted in calling himself Kuchu-mara. He went to the extent of pressing the King to perform his marriage with the Princess. The Princess agreed to the marriage but she told the King that he should see that great pandits from various countries were invited to attend the marriage. She hoped that Kuchu-mara would not fail to attend if he came to know of her marriage, wherever he might be. She also hoped that the impostor would be unmasked by the visiting pandits.

Kuchu-mara was not aware of all these developments. One morning he was plying the ferry when he saw a group of pandits arrive at the other bank. From their talk he learned that Princess Saraswati was to be married that very day and the bridegroom was—himself! He was at first surprised at the news. Then he was tickled to see how the Princess would marry him in his absence. So, tying up the ferry, he followed the pandits to the capital.



Many a great king, poet and pandit came to attend the wedding of Princess Saraswati. Shambara was dressed like a bridegroom and seated amidst the guests. Some of the guests, who had known Kuchu-mara at Banaras, detected the fraud. They surrounded Shambara and began to test his scholarship. Shambara had not foreseen that there would be so much trouble in impersonating Kuchu-mara. Presently the fraud was exposed. The King rushed to Shambara and demanded, "Who are you, fellow? What is your real name?" Shaking with terror, Shambara confessed all.

The King was very indignant. "Take this fellow and behead him!" he shouted to his men.

All the time Kuchu-mara was enjoying the fun seated in a corner. Now he came forward and pleaded with the King to spare Shambara. "O King," he said, "don't punish this fool. I know his parents, they are really nice people. I am the real Kuchu-mara. Since I excuse him there is no reason why you should punish him."

Shambara was let off. Saraswati became Kuchu-mara's wife that very day amidst great pomp and splendour.

PUBLISHED
IN 1971

The Blue Rose



nce upon a time there was a farmer who was very ill. He had an only son, called Colin, who had tried every cure possible to make him well again.

"Last night I had a dream," said the father one morning. "In this dream, a fairy came and told me that the only way I could be cured was to get hold of a blue rose, which grows in an ancient castle, close to the sea. Whoever gets possession of it will have perfect health and long life."

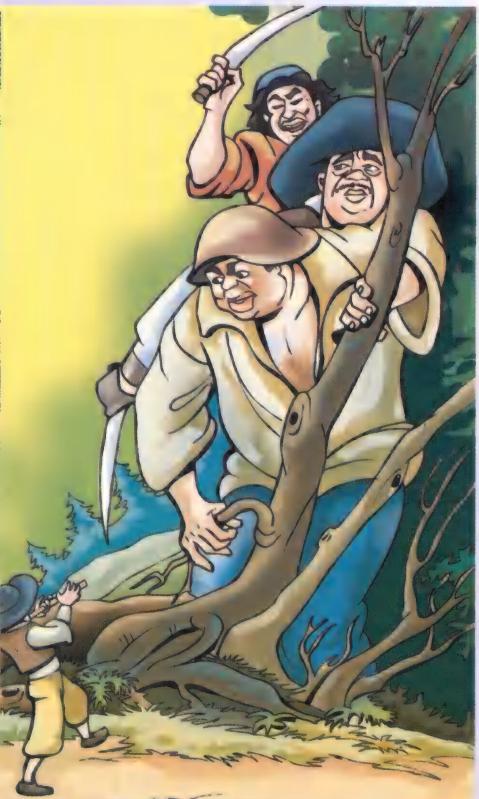
"If I have to cross all the lands and all the seas, I will find the blue rose for you, father," Colin promised him.

Pausing only to collect a little food, Colin set off on his journey.

When it was getting dark, he came to the edge of a forest, very tired and hungry. He stopped and took out of his pocket a small piece of meat and some dry bread.

As he was about to eat it, he noticed an old woman nearby, looking at him and licking her lips.

"Are you hungry, too?" he asked.



"Very much—it's two days since I tasted any food," she replied.

At once Colin divided the meat and bread and handed one half to her.

"Thank you," she sighed when she had eaten. "You are a good boy and I will reward you. Take this whistle. When blown it gives out a note so soft that only you will be able to hear it. If you blow one note, everything near to you will stand still like a statue for as long as you wish. If you blow two notes, persons around you will run and dance as though mad. If you blow three notes, then your table will be covered with good things to eat."

Thanking the old woman, Colin went to find a place to sleep for the night. He found a small cottage, the door of which was opened by a poor peasant.

"Come in, my boy," he smiled. "My wife and seven children are just sitting down to supper, but we have nothing better to offer you than a little bread and dried fruit."

Colin turned his head and blew three silent notes on the whistle. Inside the cottage,

the table at once became loaded with food and drink.

"What was that you told me?" asked Colin, going inside. "This is not just bread and dried fruit."

Amazed, the peasant could not guess what had happened, but he and his family sat down to a meal such as they had never eaten before—and there was plenty left for later.

In the morning, when he was leaving, Colin asked if they knew anything of the blue rose.

"When I was at sea, I heard of many wonderful things," the peasant told him. "There is somewhere a magic castle, in which a beautiful princess is a prisoner. You must wake up this princess and ask her to give you the blue rose but, to get to the castle, you have to go through a thick forest full of giants and then make the keeper of the castle, who is an evil wizard, give you the golden key which opens the tower in which the princess is a prisoner. Take care, however, for the wizard makes everybody who enters his forest prisoners for the rest of their lives."

Colin thanked them and continued his journey. When he reached the magic forest, he heard angry voices like the rumbling of thunder, and three great giants, with big knives in their hands, rushed at him. Anyone else would have tried to run away in fear, but Colin secretly blew one note on the whistle and at once the giants became rooted to the spot like stone statues and he was able to walk past them without being harmed.

Thus he arrived safely at the magic castle. The door opened and the ugly face of the keeper glared out.

"Come in, come in," growled the keeper. "I suppose you, too, have come to collect the blue rose?"

"Yes, that's right," said Colin.

The keeper chuckled and slammed the door shut behind them. "You are my prisoner for ever," he said. "From now on you will be my slave. If you dare touch the golden key, or annoy me in the slightest way, I will chop your head off."

"Very well," nodded Colin, calmly.

He set about being a servant to the keeper and got him a meal, but when the magician was about to try the first mouthful, Colin blew on the whistle once and he

remained rigid, with the fork halfway to his mouth.

Colin laughed and laughed. When all the other servants came in, carrying trays of food, he blew the whistle twice and they began to run to and from the kitchen like mad, bringing more and more food, which they stuffed into the keeper's mouth, until he could take no more.

"That's enough," laughed Colin. "You can see that he is like a statue and cannot move. Now you can all escape from here."

When the servants had hurried away, delighted at their freedom, the boy took the golden key and went to the castle tower, where the princess was being kept prisoner.

She was fast asleep on a silver bed, but when Colin sounded the whistle twice, she jumped up and began to run and dance. Quickly, he changed the magic spell and explained to the girl the reason for his visit.

"Here is the blue rose," she said, offering it to him. "I was keeping it hidden in this tower and because I would never give it to him, the keeper put a spell upon me to remain asleep for the rest of my life."

"Now you are free, princess," said Colin. "As for the keeper—well, come and see for yourself."



The princess laughed when she saw him still sitting at the table like a statue, too full of food to be able to speak. "Let him remain there like that forever," she said. "It is what he deserves."

Happily, Colin and the princess went back to the father, and when he touched the blue rose he was at once made quite well again ... and his joy was complete when, later on, Colin and the princess were married.



PUBLISHED
IN 1974

Knowledge of a Trade

The King of Jaipur had a son named Jaipal. Vijay, a commoner was a great friend of the prince. The two were inseparable and were to be found always together.

One day when they were returning from a hunt, they stopped at a village well to drink water. Some belles of the village were drawing water from the well, and on seeing the two thirsty strangers, offered

them some. But each girl poured out the water on the ground, until a seventh one filled an earthen vessel and offered it to the two youth. The prince was rather annoyed and spoke sharply. "What strange game is this? Here we are thirsty, and you pour out the water on the ground!"

The girl who had given him water replied, "Sir, it is obvious that you have

ridden far and must be hot and bothered. If we gave the cold water of the well at once, it will only increase your discomfort. That's why we delayed giving you water."

Jaipal was rather pleased with this answer. He looked at her and found her to be beautiful and intelligent. So he asked, "What is your name?"

She said, "My name is Madhavi, and I am the daughter of a shepherd. But who are you?"

The prince refused to reveal his identity and rode off.

Jaipal went straight to his parents and informed them that he desired to marry the shepherd's daughter. They tried to dissuade him from his purpose but he remained adamant. At last they yielded to his desire and sent emissaries to the shepherd who was only too happy to agree to the alliance. But Madhavi had different ideas though inwardly she was very happy to know that the visitor of the previous day was actually the prince. She asked the emissaries, "I am honoured by the proposal of the prince. But has he learnt any trade?"

The emissaries said, "The prince has no need to learn a trade. He has plenty of men to do his bidding."

Madhavi replied, "Ah! But times may change. Princes may become paupers, and vice versa. Your prince must be prepared with some skill or the other. When he can do that then I'll marry him."

When the royal emissaries reported this to the king and queen, they were secretly pleased because they did not want the prince to marry so far beneath his status. But the prince became thoughtful and said, "True, Madhavi is right. I must learn a trade. I think I'll become a weaver."

So he began practising on a loom and within a short time had become a skilled weaver.

As proof of his newly acquired skill, he sent Madhavi a beautifully done cloak. She was encouraged to find that this talent alone would save the prince from poverty. So she consented to marry him.

A few days after the wedding, Vijay, the bosom friend of the prince, disappeared from the city, and no trace of him was found for many months.

In course of time, Jaipal became the king in place of his deceased father, and ruled wisely. One day Madhavi told him, "Sire, a king must know what happens in different parts of the kingdom. I hear that from time to time some young people

disappear from their homes. No one knows where they go. You must investigate and return the missing persons to their families."

Jaipal thought this was a good idea, and donning the costume of a farmer, set out to travel throughout the length and breadth of his kingdom.

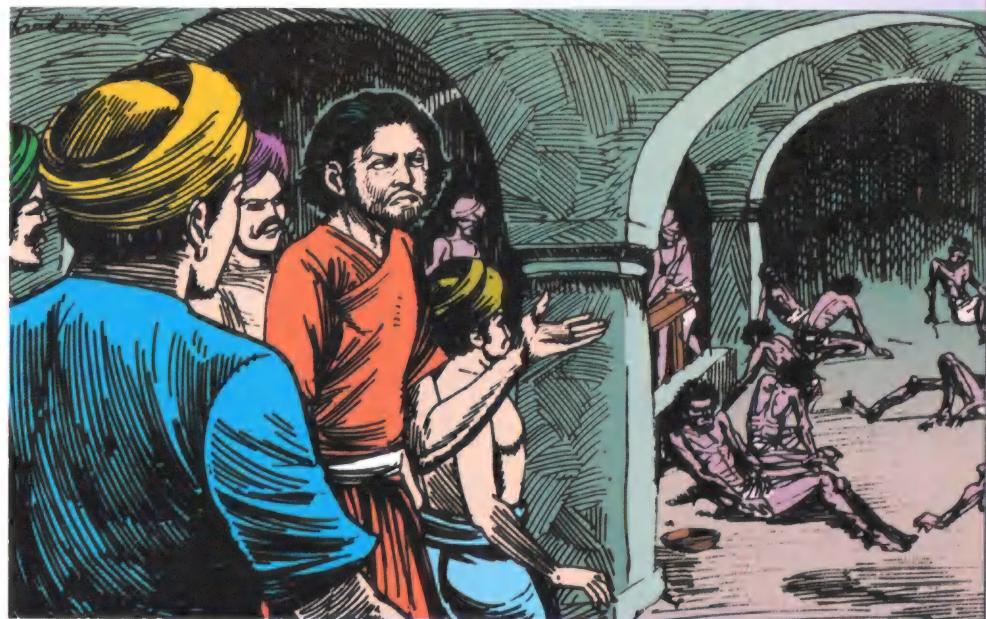
One day he came to a small hamlet called Shakthipur and saw the villagers heaping presents on a venerable old hermit. When the prince enquired about this, he was told that the hermit was the priest of the local Kali temple who possessed miraculous powers. That was why people flocked to his presence.

Jaipal also joined the throng of people and bowed before Shaktidas. The hermit, on spotting him, said, "Young man! Who are you, and what do you work at?"

Jaipal said, "Sir, I am a foreigner in these parts. In fact, I am searching for some occupation."

Shaktidas looked at him and said, "Want a job, eh? Come with me."

Then he signalled to some of his disciples and they took Jaipal with them. Quite a number of job seekers had swelled the ranks of the hermit's followers and all of them went behind Shaktidas. Jaipal



wondered what kind of work the hermit had in store for him. He was not left in doubt much longer.

Shaktidas led them to a large mansion in the outskirts of the town. Once inside, he took them down a flight of steps and came to a huge iron door. He opened this with a brass key and motioned them inside. Obediently, all the young men trooped in. Jaipal was the last one through, when the iron door clanged behind them and they heard the sound of a key turning in the lock.





Everything was dark inside. Jaipal felt trapped. He realised that Shaktidasa had played foul with him and the others. He set out to explore his new surroundings and came to a row of caves in which a number of thin and emaciated people were lying. As soon as he entered this chamber, a wretched-looking man accosted them and said, "Ah! New victims eh! Don't you know that this Shaktidasa and his minions are really wicked trolls who lure innocent travellers to this house so that they can eat them? They spare only those who can work at some trade. But ultimately all who come here die a horrible death."

Jaipal recognised with shock that the speaker was his missing friend, Vijay, but the latter did not know him. The king kept

his counsel and did not reveal himself. Just then one of Shaktidasa's men came in and gave them some food to eat. The idea was to fatten them for the day of the execution. But Jaipal ate little and set about exploring ways and means of escape. He asked for and got a loom at which he worked day and night and at last turned out a beautifully woven silk saree.

Jaipal called the disciple who attended on them daily and said, "My good man. See this beautiful saree fit only for the royal women? Go to the palace and show it to the queen. She'll buy it for several thousand gold mohurs. You can certainly become rich in no time at all."

The disciple's eyes glinted with greed and, unknown to Shaktidasa, he took

the saree to the palace to sell. Madhavi who had not heard anything from Jaipal for several months was downcast at his mysterious disappearance and half-heartedly consented to see the saree. But no sooner had she set eyes on it, than she jumped up with excitement for she understood that the cloth was a special weave made by her husband. Moreover, Jaipal had cleverly traced out a message in the borders of the saree, and Madhavi could detect it easily. She realised that the king was in terrible danger. Quickly calling her guards, she imprisoned the luckless disciple who, after a severe beating, confessed to his part in the crime. Then taking an army with her, she stormed the gates of the mansion and freed all the prisoners. Shaktidasa and his wicked men were utterly destroyed.

Vijaya was re-united with his friend who turned around and said, "Well, Vijay. You must admit that knowing a trade has its uses. How else could we have got out of this mess?"

Thus thugs like Shaktidasa were routed out completely and the missing persons restored to their families. There was great rejoicing in the land and Jaipal and his wife, praised by all for their cleverness and resourcefulness, ruled happily for a long time.



Against the Massive Army of Ice

PUBLISHED
IN 2006

Will the elusive Northeast Passage ever be crossed? Centuries ago, spirited explorers dreamed of finding this maritime route along the northern coast of Europe and the Arctic region of Asia, between the Pacific and the Atlantic oceans. Their goal was to reach the great oriental countries, particularly the glorious land of India with her varied splendour, wealth and wisdom. Indeed, a southern passage did exist around the south of America or the south of Africa. But it was jealously guarded by the Spaniards and the Portuguese and they would not let anyone else sail through it, for they feared to lose their trading monopoly with the east.

The Arctic, the almost impenetrable frozen area around the North Pole, was a formidable barrier to these heroic explorers. Alas, most of them were ultimately forced to return home without any success. But no

one pursued this great adventurous quest with such tenacious skill and courage as the intrepid navigator William Barents.

He was born about the middle of the 16th century in that small country called Holland, now Netherlands. In 1594, he left Amsterdam in two ships seeking a northeast way to eastern Asia. Before long he was forced to turn back. The following year he commanded another expedition of seven ships and went as far as the island of Novaya Zemlya. Here, Gerrit de Veer, a member of the crew and the historian of the voyages, recounts, "... some of our men went ashore on firm land, to seek for stones which looked like diamonds, and two of our men lying together in one place, a great, lean, white bear came stealing out, and caught one of them fast by the neck, who, not perceiving what it was, cried out and said, 'Who is it that pulls me by the neck?'

wherewith the other, lifting up his head to see who it was, cried out, and said, 'Oh mate, it is a bear', and therewith presently rose up and ran away."

The ferocious beast killed the man and when "the rest of the men that were on the land, being about twenty, ran presently thither ... and having charged their pieces and bent their pikes, set upon her, who was still devouring the man; but she, perceiving them to come towards her, fiercely ran at them, and, getting another of them out from the company, tore him in pieces, wherewith all the rest ran away."

Before long, great masses of ice floating in the sea blocked any further advance. William Barents and his men had to return home. But he did not give up hope and made yet another determined attempt. In May 1596, a strong healthy crew of Dutchmen under the leadership of





the brave explorer set sail in two ships. Soon they reached the Arctic Ocean, the smallest of the world's oceans and distinguished by a constant cover of ice. Here the men observed that daily the day grew longer and longer and the night shorter and shorter. Then on June 1, to their surprise, there was no night at all. The sun did not set but went round the sky. So it did for many days. This part of the world is sometimes known as the "Land of the Midnight Sun".

"Look at those flocks of lovely white swans!" exclaimed a sailor and called

his companions to come on the deck to have a glimpse of the unusual sight. But as they approached it, their ships were surrounded by white chunks of ice floating on the water. And there was no sign of the birds. Realising their mistake, that they had seen only an illusion, they skilfully guided the vessels between two great frozen walls and came to a large island with tapering hills. William Barents named the place "Spitsbergen", meaning in Dutch "Pointed Mountains", and the place is known by this name even today. Here the two ships parted ways, because the explorer and the captain of the second ship could not agree in which direction to proceed from this point.

They reached Novaya Zemlya and anchored in a place that they named Ice Haven. Now a terrible storm drove the ice so hard against the ship that the rudder broke and one of the small boats by her side was crushed to pieces. Soon the ice packed so closely round her that the vessel was lifted up about five feet out of the water. With no respite, the ice kept on cracking and bursting with deafening sound and squeezed the ship so hard that all on board feared that she would be crushed to bits in no time.

At last they gave up all hope to proceed any further. They gave up all hope, too, of returning home that year. They would have to spend the winter there till the coming of fairer weather. Barents decided to build a house on land where it would be safer than in the ship. The sailors found some timber lying on the shore, which must have drifted across the sea. The region was bare of any trees. They used this wood to build their little dwelling and took the boards from the deck of the ship to make the roof and the walls.

So bitter cold it was that when the carpenter put a nail into his mouth while working, it froze to his lips and tongue, and when he took it out again, it drew blood and was covered with ice. At last their little hut was ready. It had no windows, the only openings were a door and a chimney with a barrel on top. They carried in all their stores from the ship and went to live in it.

Some men fought with the wild polar bears. They shot one and made it stand up on its hind legs. To their amazement, the dead beast soon froze quite stiff in that position. The biting cold made many of them sick and some even died. Gradually the days were now getting shorter and the nights longer. Then, in early November, the

sun did not rise at all and there was always darkness and night. They did not know when they would see the sun again. Only a small lamp lighted their little dwelling. It burned the oil from the fat of the bears they had hunted.

By Christmas, their little house was almost buried under snow. They heard foxes running over the roof. When the men wanted to go out, they had to dig the snow away from the door and then cut steps in it leading up to the top as though they lived in a deep cellar. Sometimes they found it much easier just to climb out through the chimney. For months together they thus lived in extreme cold and darkness, yearning for the light of the day. The stout and sturdy sailors had now become thin and feeble, with swollen joints and bleeding gums. They had been stuck by an illness called scurvy, from which explorers often suffer when they went without fresh food for long.

At last at the end of January, to their great joy, the sun appeared once again, darkness disappeared and the light lasted longer and longer every day. This indeed cheered up William Barents and his men and they now looked forward to brighter and warmer weather. They had the glimpse of the open sea when the strong wind

sometimes drove the ice away from the land. Soon they would be able to sail away. But to their dismay, the wind changed its direction and the ice round their ship only piled up higher and higher.

Now everyone was at his wit's end. The sailors pleaded to let them go in the two boats of the ship. Barents had no option but to agree to their suggestion. A road was cut over the rough ice from the ship to the water. Then the boats were dragged over it. They were at last sailing once again. But to their despair, their ailing captain could no longer withstand the rigours of the journey and died. The men were very sorry indeed for they loved and admired William Barents and none could guide them as well as he had done.

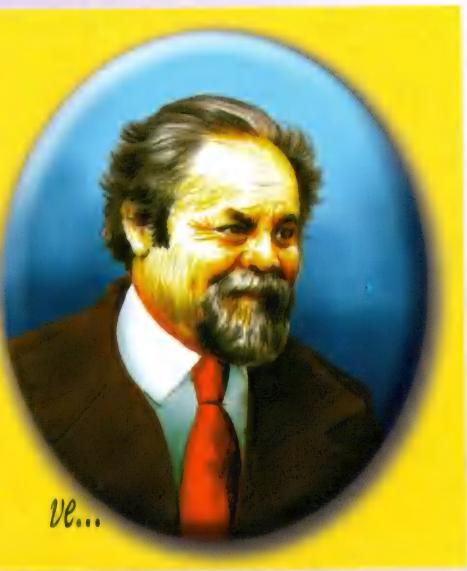
Then the surviving members of the crew of sixteen came across the Dutch ship from which they had parted the year before. In fact, the vessel had returned home and after the winter, was back again. Gladly leaving behind their two open boats in which they had covered almost 1,600 hazardous miles, the exhausted men went on board and were soon heading towards home.

William Barents and his men were the first to survive the winter in those desolate,

frozen and unforgiving regions of the Arctic. Nearly three hundred years later, in 1871, the little wooden house where they had wintered was discovered undisturbed with many relics which are preserved at The Hague. A part of the explorer's journal was also found in 1875.

The voyages of this great sailing master stand in the first rank among the polar expeditions of the 16th century. Indeed, William Barents failed in his courageous endeavour. But he had set a living example and paved the way for future adventurers. Finally in 1878–79, Swedish explorer Adolf Erik Nordenskjold became the first to cross the Northeast Passage.





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Castaway by Choice!

PUBLISHED
IN 2007

As the night was slowly unfolding into a fine spring day in the year 1951, the phone rang in the young doctor's home. He was being urgently called to the hospital. At once he hurried towards the hospital, thinking all the way what might have gone wrong. A shipwreck had occurred near the coast of his town, Boulogne-sur-mer in France. The youth later sadly recollectéd, "I shall never forget the terrible spectacle of those forty-three men piled on top of one another, like dislocated puppets, their feet bare, and each still wearing a lifebelt. In spite of all our efforts, we failed to revive a single one. An error of navigation lasting a few moments had caused forty-three deaths and orphaned seventy-eight children."

"If only something could be done to avoid such disasters!" the youth earnestly thought. From that day, the word "shipwreck" became for him "the very expression of human misery, a synonym for despair, hunger and thirst". He remembered how on 2nd July, 1816

the frigate, *La Meduse*, perilously struck a sandbank off the African coast. There were almost four hundred sailors on board. Only fifteen survived and of them, some died soon after, while some others went completely mad. Then, on April 15, 1912, took place one of the worst tragedies in maritime history. The colossal *Titanic* collided against an iceberg and sank with great loss of life. Around fifteen hundred people perished and, out of the number of survivors, many became insane.

Couldn't those shipwrecked linger on in the mid-ocean till rescue came? Most of them died much sooner out of despair and fright than it normally would have taken them to perish of hunger and thirst. "To hope is to seek better things. The survivor of a shipwreck, deprived of everything, must never lose hope. The simple and brutal problem confronting him is that of death or survival. He will need to bolster his courage with all his resources and all his faith in life to fight off despair," said the doctor. Only if

he could give them courage, strength and hope! But how?

This young man was none other than Alain Bombard, born in Paris on October 27, 1924. While still a boy he quickly developed a love for the sea and especially navigation. He studied medicine, psychology and marine biology. Later, on completing his education, he began working at a hospital in Boulogne. Now he straightaway embarked upon his new adventure. He carried out detailed studies, browsed through records of shipwrecks and talked to survivors. Before long, he was all set to act as a voluntary castaway and sail on a long voyage across the ocean with no provisions of food and water.

"He's a crackpot!" laughed all those who came to know of his foolhardy project. Many scientists, too, took his ideas as wild. "Crazy! How can he ever think of surviving in the sea without fresh water and food?" they wondered.

But that did not discourage the brave and the so-called foolish doctor. He was confident that the ocean's bounty would provide him with everything that is required to sustain his body. Drinking large quantities of salt water might prove fatal but a few sips suitably diluted could be beneficial. He discovered that fresh fish contained fifty to eighty per cent of usable water, which was also salt-free. So a catch of about seven pounds of fish would be enough for the day's water requirement. The fish, too, would provide him with protein and fat and the vital vitamins and carbohydrates would come from plankton, millions of microscopic creatures, algae and weed usually found on the surface of the sea. They are in fact the principal food of the whales, the largest living mammals. Indeed, a balanced healthy diet he would have!

October 19, 1952 was a fine day. The intrepid Alain Bombard was given a rousing send off. He set sail on his unique adventure in an inflatable rubber dinghy named The Heretic. He planned to cross the great Atlantic Ocean and follow one of the routes of Columbus from the Canaries via Cape Verde Islands to Barbados in the West Indies. He was indeed risking his own life in

order to save the lives of sailors who might be shipwrecked in future. Would he succeed in his noble mission?

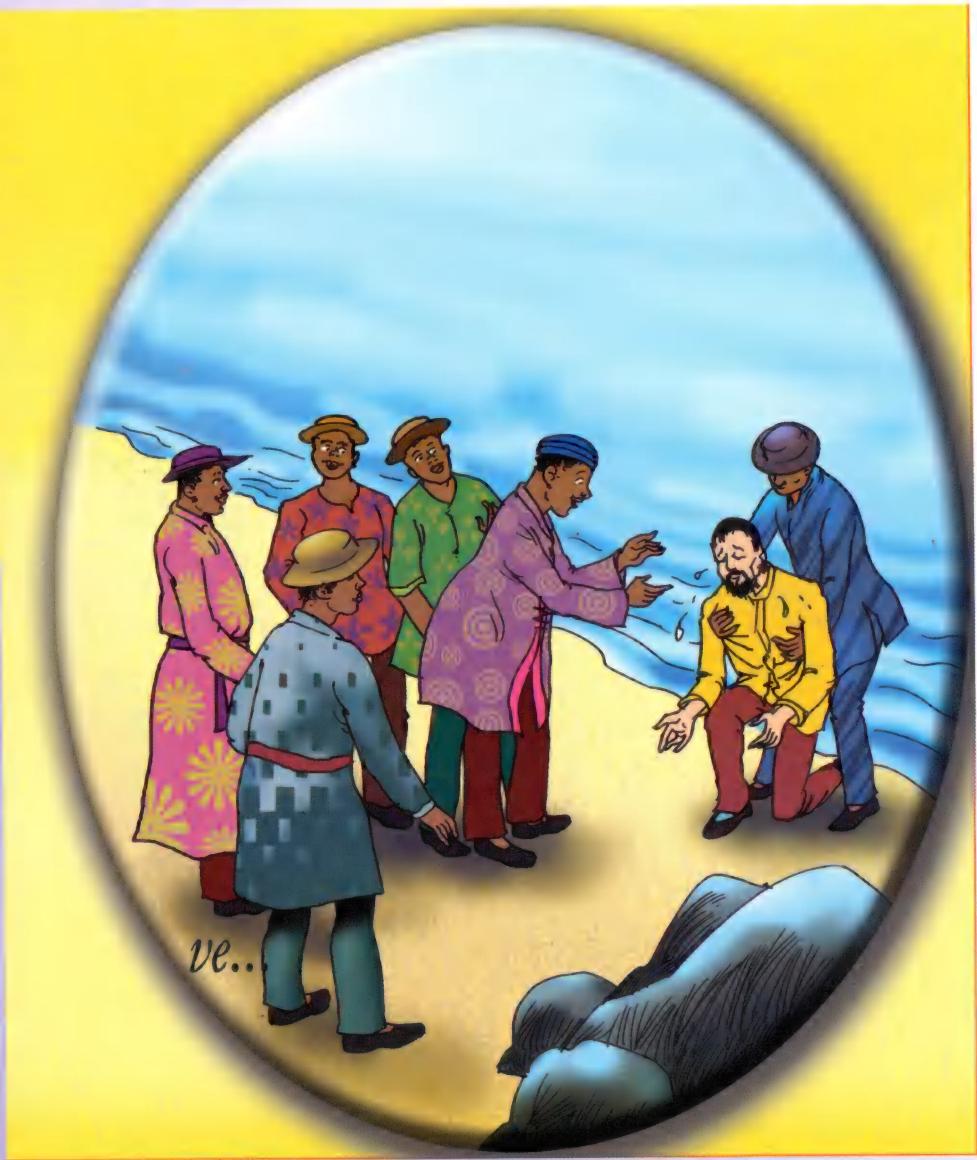
The little boat slowly drifted into a calm sea without a breath of breeze. He failed to catch any fish in the first couple of days. So he was forced to drink the daily allowance of seawater to quench his thirst. One night the wind suddenly blew with the force of a gale and a giant wave toppled the dinghy. Only her inflated floats were visible above water and the rest had become part of the sea. Like a wreck, the little craft still continued on its ambitious course, while her master made frantic efforts to drain the water with his hat before the next onslaught of the colossal body of water. Thus the tussle continued with the elements for two long hours before there was some respite as the storm gradually died down.

Some time passed. He was just settling down to get back his breath when a sudden gust tore the little sail apart. Luckily, he had a spare one and at once he raised it up. Alas, another blast of wind soon whipped it off and sent it away flying like a kite. He now had no option left but to mend the torn sail, hoping that the stitches would hold on till the end of his journey.



He caught many fish, including the flying ones that landed on the deck. They provided him with his food and drink though he did not like the taste of them. One day a big bird called the shearwater pounced on the bait of his fishing line hanging in the air over the edge of the boat. He caught it and, as he was hungry, ate one half and left the other half on the deck for drying in the sun. At night through his tent he saw a ghostly bluish white glimmer of light. Was it a spirit from the vast deep? Or had something caught fire? Nervously he





peeped out only to find that the remaining part of the bird was giving out a strong phosphorescent glow that reflected on the sail.

To his dismay, one day his watch stopped and from then on he had to keep track of time from the movement of the sun and the moon. Wherever he looked, there was nothing but the sea and the sky. He felt like a mere speck in this vast expanse of water. He was indeed feeling very lonely, and solitude seemed to be wearing him down. He was part of a strange and silent world. "It was a vast presence which engulfed me," he described. "Its spell could not be broken, any more than the horizon could be brought nearer. And if from time to time I talked aloud in order to hear my own voice, I only felt more and more alone, a hostage to silence." Will he be able to conquer his loneliness or become mad like many shipwrecked men?

Before long, perhaps due to his diet and constant humidity, he lost a toenail. There appeared strange rashes on the back of his hands and painful spots of skin eruptions all over his body. He could not sit down for long and it became more and more difficult to find a comfortable position. He had a small air cushion on which he found it convenient to rest his weight on.

One morning it so happened that by chance the air pillow got knocked overboard and was seen floating about two hundred yards away from the rear of the boat. Lowering his sail and putting out the sea anchor, Alain Bombard dived in to fetch it. He was a powerful swimmer and reached it in no time. But when he turned round, he saw to his dismay his little boat gleefully sailing off. The speed seemed to be too fast for him to even catch up with her. It now looked as if his dinghy would cross the Atlantic without him. What had gone wrong? The sea anchor, usually shaped like a parachute had, for reasons unknown, jammed and entangled itself and could no longer arrest the vessel's drift.

So, with a supreme effort the brave castaway swam as fast as his weak limbs allowed him. Can he recover his little boat? But she was speeding farther and farther away. Everything seemed to be lost. However, to his joy and amazement, the craft miraculously slowed down. Soon he captured it.

A group of friendly dolphins faithfully followed the dinghy twenty-four hours. A tiny black with a white-tipped tail paid him a daily visit without fail exactly at four in the afternoon. He had several encounters

with dangerous sword and ray fish. Occasionally, whales, too, curiously swam round and under the craft. One night an ominous and hungry-looking shark appeared determined to have him for a meal. It gave a good fight but Bombard finally managed to kill it.

One day, rains came down, to his great joy. He got drenched and drank the rainwater to his heart's content. It was like nectar to him. But the rigours of the journey were having their toll on his health. There were boils all over his body. He watched strips of skin peeling from his feet and nails from four of his toes dropping off in three days. He also suffered from a violent form of diarrhoea lasting for fourteen days. It completely wore him down. He had on deck a sealed box of emergency medicines. But he was now a castaway and he wanted to remain so for as long as he could bear his painful ailments. Otherwise how could he prove his point?

In his log book, which he meticulously maintained, he wrote: "Visited today by a butterfly. Also saw a gossamer thread floating in the air, such as spider's spin on land. Surely, after that, land cannot be far away." Day after day went by and yet there was no sign of land. He was baffled and

knew not where he was. "God, what can I do to end this terrible uncertainty?" he prayed.

As the sun rose over a calm ocean the following day, he saw to his delight a ship sailing by. Its captain shouted at the top of his voice, "May we help you?"

"Please tell me, Sir, the time, the day and my exact position," asked the solitary sailor.

When he got the answers to his queries he was stunned beyond belief. Still six hundred miles were left to reach his destination and fifty-three days had already passed since he started his journey. Will he be able to make it to the end now? The kind captain proposed to take him and his little boat on board his ship. Alain Bombard almost agreed to the very tempting invitation but decided otherwise and continued on his bizarre journey.

On the eve of Christmas, 23rd December, 1952, the local natives were surprised to see a shrunken man staggering ashore on the beach of Barbados in the West Indies. "Who could be this stranger?" they wondered! After sixty-five days of gruelling ordeal, Alain Bombard had become almost fifty-five pounds lighter, but was alive. Later

in life he received many letters from sailors who had managed to survive in the sea from near-death situations, taking inspiration from his most amazing adventure which he has wonderfully recounted in his book *The Bombard Story*.

Alain Bombard zealously continued his research work, taught, lectured and set up a marine laboratory. He also joined politics and avidly championed the cause of the environment. On the 50th anniversary of his epic voyage, while replying to an interviewer, he said: "I had fought on behalf of men against the sea, but I realise that it has become more urgent to fight on behalf of the sea against men."

He died on July 19, 2005, at the age of eighty in a southern town of France.



PUBLISHED
IN 2007

In the Jaws of the Deadly Reefs



In the course of his voyage of exploration more than two centuries ago, one of the bravest English sailors, Captain James Cook, came across an archipelago in the South Pacific Ocean. The amiable inhabitants received him and his men with such warm hospitality that the explorer named their sunny little abodes the Friendly Islands. This group of islets, known as the Kingdom of Tonga, nestles between New Zealand and Australia.

Not only were the natives of Tonga gregarious, but they had a love for adventure. Often many of these simple folks dreamed of sailing across the dangerous seas to other countries. So, one fine July morning in 1962, a sturdy little ship called *Tuaikaepau* left the capital town of Tonga, and headed towards New Zealand.

A hefty six feet tall fine seaman, Tevita Fifita, led the crew of seven men. He

commanded instant respect and obedience from all those who sailed under him. There were ten other Tongan passengers too. Some of them were boxers, who looked forward to enjoy some bouts of fight in some new land and return home richer and perhaps wiser. Among them were also a taxi-driver and a skilled carpenter. Thus, each of the seventeen had a dream of his own. But, will they be able to make it across the dangerous ocean?

On went the sturdy little ship, *Tuaikaepau*. There blew a fair and gentle breeze. Hundreds of excited Tongans had lined up the home shore to bid the adventurers a fitting farewell.

Before long they sailed straight into the teeth of a strong adverse wind. With each passing day, the wind grew fiercer and fiercer and the sea became rougher and rougher.

Soon a terrible gale battered the brave little ship with her seventeen brave men. The sky turned as black as night that brought lashing rains. The turbulent ocean sent up gigantic waves that broke on board. The engine had to be shut down and the sails folded up. *Tuaikaepau* now tossed like a cork on the swelling sea. Everyone began to panic, with the captain asking them to remain calm. Then, suddenly, something extraordinary took place. As though by magic, the ship came to a standstill, lightly swaying to and fro and side to side. It looked as though it was being held in a vice-like grip from under the water. But all around, the storm still continued with greater fury.

"What happened?" wondered the captain and his crew.

"Oh! Something strange seems to be taking place!" exclaimed the other passengers.

Soon they realised that their sturdy little ship had firmly stuck on a coral reef. It was one of the deadly Minerva Reefs, every sailor's nightmare. The north and south Minerva Reefs were two rings of almost submerged coral lying between the main island of Tonga and New Zealand. In 1829, a whaling ship, *Minerva*, wrecked on these reefs and subsequently they were

named after the lost vessel. Since then there had been a host of shipwrecks on these two razor-sharp, dangerous reefs that went below the water when the tide was high.

What will now be the fate of Captain Fifita and his men? It was already nightfall and he knew that they were in grave danger. He ordered everyone to hold on to the mast. He counted the dark forms on the swaying deck. All seventeen of them were there. Some seemed to be praying hard looking up to the sky. Others simply clung together for dear life. Now any moment the reef would tear apart their dear ship and they would be at the mercy of the waves and the wind.

"As I can remember, it was so uncomfortable and terrifying as the wind was still blowing strongly, the rain slashing our faces and we were surrounded by darkness. It was also very cold," described one of them.

The tremendous pounding blows from the sea continued all through the dark and eerie night. Then the mighty force of the waves violently breaking on the vast claw-tooth reef tore apart the ship from stem to the stern. Suddenly, all found themselves standing in knee-deep water on the deadly corals. They at once began gathering the

floating pieces of timber from the wreckage of their vessel.

"As we were stranded on the reef awaiting daylight, I thought that not one was not contemplating death. Throughout the night, I honestly believed that the cold wind, water splashing on us, and the fear of what might happen to us, would overpower everyone's will to survive," remembered Feuiaki, one of the crew.

Dawn brought hope and one of them excitedly shouted, "Look! There's an island!"

But as the sun rose higher, what appeared to be an island now seemed like a two-storeyed dwelling. A temporary raft was quickly made out of the floating timbers. Then gathering all that could be salvaged from the wreckage of their ship, the seven crew and the ten passengers headed towards the site a mile away. At least it gave them some consolation in the middle of a desolate ocean.

Soon they found to their amazement, what looked like a cosy house from a distance was a large wooden ship thrown up on the highest part of the reef, where she wedged firmly and safely on her side, her mast sticking out almost in a





horizontal direction. At high tide, only a small portion got submerged in water. Some details found on the deck showed that it was a Japanese ship trapped by the reef three years ago in 1959. It will now be the home of these Tongan castaways till the arrival of rescuers.

Though abandoned, and perhaps its sailors rescued by another ship, the Japanese vessel had some foodstuff and drums of fuel oil for them. The sea, too, offered them lots of fish. But there

was not enough drinking water. Luckily a matchbox was found and a fire was lit. There was a boiler in the wreck. It was used for cooking and steaming and condensing the salty water to make it drinkable. Soon a list was drawn up for everyone to take turns in tending the fire, for there were no more matchsticks left to kindle another.

One day Feuiaki and Viliami Fa, two of the crew, were returning with a handsome catch of fish. Suddenly, to their horror, they

found that a shark was stealthily pursuing them. They offered the animal the whole lot of fish hoping that it would leave them in peace. But after consuming the fish it still hung around and was fast heading towards the two companions. Suddenly Feuiaki suffered from severe cramps and could no longer swim.

"Please proceed and leave me here to die," he told his friend.

But Viliami Fa asked him to hang on, while he threw his spear at the animal with all his might. The weapon crashed onto the shark's head. Now it charged at the two men with greater force and speed. Feuiaki, just managing to keep himself afloat, made a supreme effort and hurled his own spear. It got its mark and pierced through one of the shark's eyes. By then the others had come to their rescue and they managed to kill the animal and made a feast of it on the deck.

With the paint found in the wreck, several SOS messages were written on pieces of wood, fishing buoys and drums. One read, "SOS 17 Men on Minerva Reef" and the other, "SOS Tuai kapau Minerva Reef". They were all cast adrift on the sea. The stranded men earnestly hoped that someone would come across

them and raise the alarm. They waited and waited. Days passed into weeks and weeks rolled into months. Yet there were no signs of any rescuers.

The seventeen brave men did not lose hope. They had faith and continued to pray, and found comfort in their prayers.

By and by many of them began to feel unwell. It was now becoming difficult to keep the fire going as the stock of firewood was slowly running out. The water from steaming was also getting scarce and was not enough to quench everyone's thirst. The captain soon realised that help might never come. He decided to build a boat, a small vessel to carry three handpicked men to the nearest island over 200 miles away. There they would try to seek help for the remaining colleagues.

It was remarkable how they went about with great ingenuity building a seaworthy boat with no proper materials and tools except a hammer. It looked like a miracle when the vessel stood ready to sail. They named it *Maloleili*, meaning Good Morning. So the captain, his son and another member set out on their rescue mission, risking their own lives. But before departure, Captain Fifita reminded the remaining men on the wreck to be calm and

patient. In case nothing happened within fourteen days, they should assume them to be dead. Then they must themselves organise, if possible, other rescue operations.

For the next eleven days, there was no news. Everyone got anxious about the fate of the little boat and its three braver crew. Unfortunately, due to stormy weather and rough sea, the boat sank on the reef surrounding the island of Fiji. Captain Fifita's son was drowned in spite of his father's valiant effort to save him. So, the captain and his companion managed to swim ashore and raise the alarm. Lightning telegrams were sent to the capital of Fiji and to the Kingdom of Tonga.

Before long, an aeroplane rescued the rest of the brave adventurers from the Japanese wreck after 101 days of ordeal on the Minerva Reefs. Sadly, seven of the daring ones could not make it to the end.

This was one of the incredible tales of maritime survival in recent history. True, the men could not reach their destination. Yet, with a steady faith, simple courage and a constant prayer in their hearts, they clung on to life when all seemed lost. At the end, these brave ones won.

B Y T H E W A Y

It is said of the founder-editor Mr. Chakrapani that "not a single line in Chandamama went for printing without his scrutiny and approval, even when he was bed-ridden." That was the total dedication to the magazine he was editing. Though it was meant for children, he insisted that its contents should have such moral values that would inspire even elders. This prompted him to go through every para before it was printed and published.



Rider into the Dark Continent

PUBLISHED
IN 2005

Hundreds of years ago, little was known of the huge Dark Continent of Africa. It was an enigma! Dense forests, arid deserts and swollen rivers covered this great mass of land. Hostile cannibal tribes with monstrous natures and animals never seen elsewhere on earth or even in the wildest of dreams were the denizens of its jungles and deadly swamps. The craziest tales and legends were told about the place, of mountains piercing the sky, and of fathomless abysses. No daring explorer or map-maker had really made any headway deep into the African interior, for, the savage beasts and poisoned arrows of the dangerous natives forced them to turn back. One Dean Swift thus laughed at the adventurers of his time:

*"Geographers on Afric maps
With savage pictures fill their gaps,
And o'er uninhabitable downs*

Place elephants for want of towns."

But at the end of the 18th century, European explorers turned their gaze towards one of the world's last great, unexplored regions, the heart of Africa. They dreamt of finding the source of River Niger, walk the streets of Tellem on its bank, said to have been built entirely of gold, and look at the fabled city of Timbuktu. So, in 1788, the African Association was formed in London and seven years later, none other than the intrepid Mungo Park was assigned to discover the River Niger, chart its course from the source to its termination and also visit the principal towns along its banks.

Son of a humble Scottish farmer, Mungo Park was born in 1771 in Foulshiels, Selkirk. As a boy he made astonishing progress in his studies, not only by his ready talents but by his remarkable perseverance and application. He soon distinguished

himself as a botanist and then successfully completed a course in medicine. Young Mungo Park now went to London in search of employment and was appointed assistant surgeon on a ship. But "this upstanding, well-built young Scotsman, six foot high", with unusual talents and genius caught the attention of Sir Joseph Banks, President of the Royal Society and Treasurer of the African Association. It was on his recommendation that Mungo Park was given the offer to lead an expedition to Africa.

In fact, Major Daniel Houghton was earlier sent on this mission in 1790 but, unfortunately, he was robbed and left to die in the desert. Would the brave Mungo Park succeed or would he also meet a similar fate as that of his predecessor?

So on 22 May, 1795, the twenty-four year old explorer sailed from Portsmouth in a small trading vessel. On 2 December, bidding goodbye to his tutor, he set out on

his perilous journey. An English-speaking Negro named Johnson and a black lad called Demba were his escorts. He rode on horseback, and his companions followed him on donkeys.

Soon the small daring party reached the kingdom of Bondu. Mungo Park put on his grand new blue coat with flowing tails and gold buttons and, armed with his gorgeous umbrella, appeared before the royal presence. His Majesty graciously accepted the umbrella as a gift. But he did not seem very happy. He had seen such things before. What really attracted him was his guest's blue coat and its shining buttons. After some hesitant hints, he asked for it downright. What could the explorer do but take it off and hand it over to the monarch?

Then the three continued on their way. They passed through thickets where wolves and hyenas glided across the moonlit paths, howling and yelling and creating an eerie atmosphere. They were robbed over and over again with shouts and insults. Suddenly Mungo Park realised that they were indeed passing through the Moorish kingdom of Ludamar reputed to be full of bandits.

While the explorer was hoping to quickly get out of the place and head for

some friendly realm, Ali the tyrant king sent his soldiers who took him captive. "They asked thousands of questions," wrote Mungo Park, "inspected every part of my apparel, searching my pockets, and obliged me to unbutton my waistcoat and display the whiteness of my skin. They even counted my toes and fingers, as if they doubted whether I was in truth a human being." The magnificent beard that Mungo had grown was also an object of great curiosity. It is said that he was remembered for over a hundred years in that part of Africa as "Big Beard".

Alas, for the next four months, his life became hell with continuous torture. It was the peak of summer. He lay chained in a stuffy little hut from where he could only crawl out into the scorching rays of the sun. At midnight he was given some boiled corn and filthy warm water. But more often, the lazy slaves forgot to bring him even that, and would thus neglect him for days together. He would have certainly died had not Ali's gentle wife, Fatima, secretly sent him morsels of food to save him from starvation.

"... I readily complied with every command, and patiently bore every insult; but never did any period of my life pass



away so heavily; from sunrise to sunset I was obliged to suffer, with an unruffled countenance, the insults of the rudest savages in the world," recollected Mungo Park later with sadness.

At last, the heartless Ali, realising that there was nothing more to be got out of his prisoner, agreed to set him free. Mungo Park's boy Demba had already been sold to slavery and Johnson refused to proceed any further. So his master sent him back to Dr. Laidley, with a letter to say that everything was fine and he was about to resume his journey. Not a word did he write about all that he had gone through. For, he knew that beyond this darkness of pain and torture there shone the bright hope – the hope of discovering River Niger.



Soon this dauntless adventurer escaped from this terrible place and rode into the woods at the dead of night. All alone, with no provision and no money, he plodded on towards his destination. He passed through dense thickets infested with elephants, lions and leopards. He had no weapons of any kind. Yet he was fearless, for none of these wild animals, some of whom he encountered face to face, ever attacked him. He safely slept in the open. He met friendly natives who guided him on his way.

At dawn on 21 July, 1796, glistening before his weary eyes and flashing in the tender light of the rising sun, flowed the mighty Niger. "...Looking forwards, I saw with infinite pleasure, the great object of my mission – the long sought for majestic Niger, glittering in the morning sun, as broad as the Thames at Westminster, and flowing eastwards. I hastened to the brink, and having drunk of the water, lifted up my fervent thanks in prayer to the Great Ruler of all things, for having thus far crowned my endeavours with success." Mungo Park was the first European to gaze upon this great legendary river.

He reached the town of Segu, the capital of Bambarra. But King Mansong refused to see the stranger and ordered him

to leave the country while he spared his life. So Mungo Park had no option but to ride his lean little horse, till then meekly enduring all the hardships, and continued on his journey along the river. At this juncture, if it were not for the touching kindness and compassion of some African women, whose gesture he later fondly remembered with gratitude, he and his only companion would have perished of starvation.

Now the rainy season had already set in and without a canoe it would be impossible to continue on his journey any further. He had no money with him to hire one. He was approaching the territories of the Moors from whom he did not expect any help. So, with great anguish, he decided to turn back, to come again, if possible, well equipped and prepared for the hardships of the journey.

In 1797, two years after he had landed in Africa, Mungo Park reached London on 25 December after encountering more adventures both at sea and on land. In 1805, he set out on his second expedition to the Niger. It was much larger and composed of mainly soldiers. But it proved disastrous. They were plundered on the way by bands of robbers and soon one after another the

men fell ill and died unable to withstand the rigours of the journey.

Finally, only eleven out of forty-five members of the expedition reached the Niger. But Mungo Park did not lose hope. He converted the two canoes they had into a big boat and the surviving men sailed downstream with the aim of following the course of River Niger right up to where it ended. But sadly the boat struck a rugged rock and was damaged. Meanwhile, the natives attacked them. Under the volley of spears and poisoned arrows, the brave group of adventurers perished.

Before embarking on the final stage of the expedition, Mungo Park had written: "I shall set sail for the east with the fixed resolution to discover the termination of the Niger or perish in the attempt though all the Europeans who are with me should die, and though I were myself half dead, I would persevere, and if I could not succeed in the object of my journey, I would at least die on the Niger."

He reportedly plunged himself into the swirling waters of his beloved Niger and was never heard of again. Such was the spirit of this daring adventurer! He was the greatest pioneer in the exploration of the African Continent!



Soaring Faster and Higher

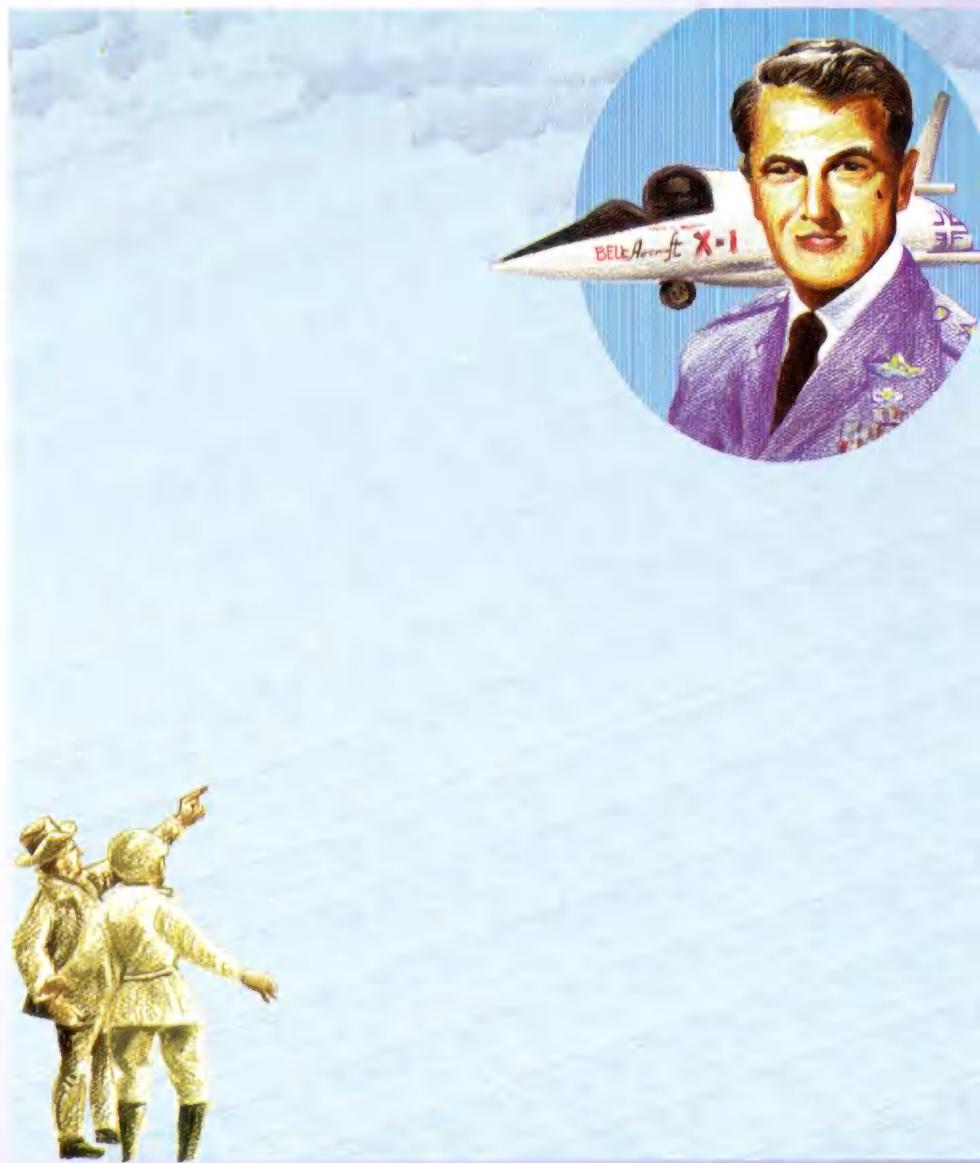
PUBLISHED
IN 2006

The brave young test pilot now dreamed of flying to the highest altitude that none had ever been before. Indeed, he was a man of superb skill and icy nerves and had many thrilling adventures in the cockpit. He was Frank K. Everest, born in August 1920 in Fairmont, West Virginia. After a course in engineering, he looked for a career in flying. Before long, he graduated as a pilot in the Air Force and received his commission in July 1942. Two years later he was sent to a fighter squadron. In 1945, the experienced and courageous pilot destroyed four Japanese aircraft before his plane was shot down by ground fire. He parachuted to safety, but inside the enemy territory, and remained a Japanese prisoner of war till the end of the conflict.

Then in 1946, Major Frank Everest was assigned to the Flight Test Division and was trained as a test pilot. He was required to fly new aircraft and evaluate

their performance by putting them through all sorts of tests. An expert pilot should be able to execute this work without wrecking the plane and without getting himself killed in the process. It was indeed a risky and challenging job. Being a highly experienced flyer, Frank was given a number of top priority projects. One such project was high altitude flights in the Bell X-1 aircraft. Will the daring adventurer be able to fulfil his dream and establish the World Altitude record?

Several weeks of preparations went by. The ace pilot stood looking intently at the new flying machine. Major Everest had a knack of making himself at home in any cockpit. He knew his plane minutely and could well ascertain what was happening in it during the flight. Man and machine were now ready for the great venture. The X-1 plane was to be carried slung under the belly of a giant B-29 bomber. Then at a specified





altitude, the parent plane would release it in the air.

So the massive bomber escorted by jet-fighters took off into the early morning sky of August 8, 1949. Major Everest put on the pressure-suit. Then adjusting the helmet on his head, he stepped into the lift that slowly lowered him down through the bomb-doors into the hanging X-1. There lay 7,000 ft of empty space between him and the ground below. When he reached the cockpit of the hanging plane, he carefully wriggled into it through its tiny doorway.

The major then plugged on his oxygen mask and the pressure suit's radio connections to the appropriate points in the cramped cabin. "I'm now ready!" he finally told the commander of the bomber. The cockpit cover quickly closed over him and made the plane airtight. He felt as if he was in another planet, completely shut off from every living thing on earth. The B-29 now climbed to 30,000 feet and then gradually dived down. Loud and clear was the pilot's voice: "Ten, nine, eight, seven, six, five, four, three, two, one! Now drop off!" The plane X-1 dropped away from its parent craft.

Like a flash of lightning the rocket aircraft surged across the sky. The test pilot was violently pushed against the back as if a giant had suddenly sat on his chest. Gasping for breath, Major Everest turned the nose of the plane towards the heavens. At 50,000ft, the mach-meter displayed nine-tenths the speed of sound. Indeed, he was fast approaching the sound barrier.

Again and again the aircraft shook and shuddered and vibrated violently. The screeching sound as it sliced across the atmosphere had now risen to a crescendo. It gave a feeling that the plane will break to pieces. Will it hold together till the end?

Then, suddenly and mysteriously, there was pin drop silence. Where did all the commotion disappear? The cockpit, too, was silent except for the very quiet shaking of the engines. The needle of the mach-meter had taken a leap forward. Major Frank Everest and his X-1 rocket plane were now travelling at supersonic speed. No doubt everything around was still and soundless! For the noise of the flight was left behind and could not move fast enough to catch them. The test pilot now changed the direction of the plane and they shot up like a meteor towards the sky.

All of a sudden there was an explosion! 'What was that?' wondered Everest. At the same instant, his pressure suit blew up and firmly held his limbs and body. He could hardly move nor could he breathe with ease. What had gone wrong? Then to his horror he saw a big crack in the canopy. It must have been a tiny chink at first, which had gradually widened and split open, sucking the air out of the cockpit. Had he not worn the pressure suit, at this altitude of almost 68,000 ft, his blood would have boiled like a vessel of water.

He was now frantically struggling against the iron clasp of the pressure suit. He managed to switch off the engines and

almost wrestled with the controls, trying to stop the plane from its ascent. Luckily the aircraft, still moving at the speed of sound, turned over and began to descend towards the earth.

'What's the matter? Are you all right?' asked a pilot of one of the escorting planes. He was bewildered, seeing this sudden change of direction after the fantastic climb.

But Frank Everest, though he heard his friend, could not answer. How could he when the pressure suit held him tightly and securely like a big hugging bear? He could scarcely move nor could he utter a single word.

The two escort pilots, who were all this while circling below, watched in great despair the plane falling down like a small boulder from the sky. 'Was this the end of X-1? Was this the heroic Major's last flight?' they sadly wondered.

But Frank Everest was calm. He was making a supreme effort to fight the vice-like grip of the pressure suit. With nerves of steel, he kept his hands steady on the controls. He knew that the slightest hesitation at this moment would mean sheer disaster. The plane would then simply

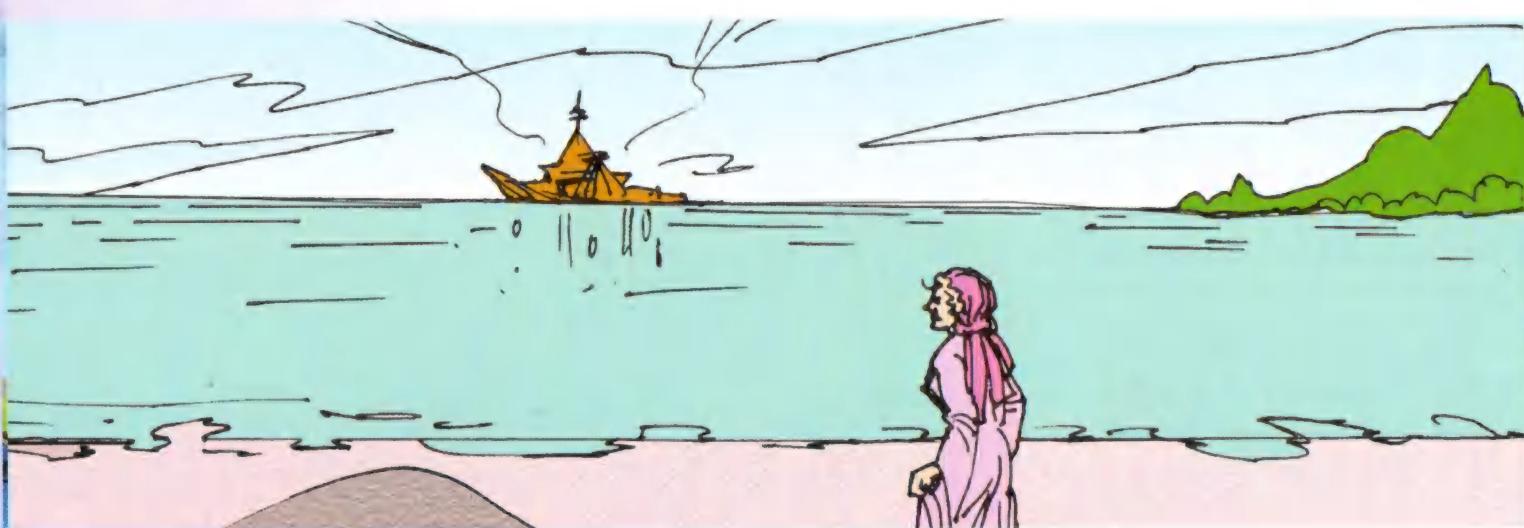
throw itself about in the skies like a mad cow and smash itself to pieces on the sound barrier. Finally, at 20,000 ft, he managed to release the valves of the pressure suit. That gave him great relief. Then pumping out the heavy fuel that was no longer required, he managed to land his plane safely on the desert below.

Major Frank K. Everest had piloted the famous Bell X-1 to a peak altitude of 71,902 ft. He became the first pilot to have his life saved by the pressure suit. Later he flew to a number of speed and altitude records and was known at one time as "The Fastest Man on Earth" as well as the highest flier.



BY THE WAY

From the mid-50s, *Chandamama* started carrying Puranas and mythology stories, directly translated from Sanskrit. Of the series, *Veer Hanuman* (1990-94) was the longest and the most popular. The *Saga of Jagannath* was the shortest.



PUBLISHED
IN 2000

Farah's Destination

Long ago, on the seashore in the far west, there nestled a prosperous little city. In it lived a lovely little damsel called Farah, the only daughter of a well-to-do spinner of ropes. Many a hired hand worked for him.

One day, the old man told his offspring who was the apple of his eye:

"Farah dear, soon I will set sail on trade to several charming realms. Will you accompany me? Who knows, but in the

course of our journey you might not find a suitable young man whom you could take as your husband?"

The girl readily agreed, if not for anything else, at least for the thrill of the voyage.

So, they sailed off on a calm blue sea. From land to land they went, the father busy with his commerce and his daughter dreaming of the handsome prince who might soon hold her hand!

But, alas, in the middle of the sea, they were caught in a terrible storm. It twirled and swirled their ship and threw it upside down with great fury. Most of the crew and the rich old merchant perished there and then. But the fortunate young lady was cast by the mighty waves onto the shores of an unknown island.

Farah, now alone and destitute in a strange land, could remember nothing when she finally regained her consciousness. She was utterly exhausted and her limbs had no strength left in them. As she lay helpless on the soft sand, blankly looking at the vacant sky above, the scene of the shipwreck and then she being carried on the crest of the waves, dimly floated before her eyes. She began walking with faltering steps, although without any destination.

It so happened that a family of weavers was passing by. They took her with them, and nursed her back to health with loving care. Though they were poor and humble, they adopted her into their clan and taught her their trade to make cloth. By and by Farah reconciled to her new and second life and was happy.

Some years passed in peace and tranquility. One day, as Farah was strolling

down the beach enjoying the cool and refreshing breeze, suddenly a band of slave-traders saw her. They forcibly carried her away in their ship to another country and sold her off along with other captives.

Farah's happy and beautiful world collapsed once again. But her new master, who made masts for ship, was kind and gentle. He taught her the trade in his woodyard. His new apprentice was clever and learnt everything very fast to the surprise of her employer. So much satisfied was he with her sincere efforts and work that he not only set her free but treated her as his own daughter. Farah was happy once again.

"Now that you are so adept in the trade, I would like you to take up greater responsibilities," said her good master one day.

"I'm ready for it!" answered the young lady confidently.

"Very well. Farah, tomorrow my ship loaded with a cargo of masts will set sail to distant lands. I want you not only to captain it, but to promote our goods," proposed the old mastbuilder.

Farah, a lover of adventure that she was, agreed and with the blessings of her

good master, set forth on her challenging task. Mid-journey, her ship was caught in a typhoon and was wrecked and the unfortunate girl found herself again cast up all alone on the shore of a strange land.

She wept bitter tears and questioned her fate. She strongly felt that nothing in her life seemed to be working according to her expectations. Whenever all was well with her, something intervened and destroyed in a trice all her hopes and dreams.

"Why is it," she cried out for a third time, "that in the midst of my happiness, when I've adjusted well to my life and surroundings, that I'm cast down with grief? Why should such evil events come my way?"

She looked at the vast expanse of blue waters and the long stretch of sandy shore, but both remained silent to her queries. Picking herself up, she trotted inland consoling herself that there was still hope and one day life might provide her with the answer to her questions.

Now it so happened that Farah had stumbled into one of the island kingdoms, whose ruler wanted a tent. A tattered one had once come floating and some sailors had told him how it was like a movable



home. He had been fascinated. But no one in the realm knew how to make a tent.

As was the custom, heralds were being sent regularly to every nook and corner of the kingdom to bring any foreigner who might have landed on its shores, to the presence of the king. Maybe, someone who knew tent-making would be found some day!

"Good Lady, can you by any chance make and pitch a tent for us?" asked the



ruler in a hopeful strain when Farah was brought to his presence.

Farah replied with a graceful bow: "Your Majesty, I think I can do so. Only I would need the necessary materials and some helping hands."

"I shall provide you with all that you want and put a thousand workers at your disposal! Just give me a tent!" exclaimed the king with great expectations.

"First, I want bundles of strong ropes!" she said.

Alas, there was none to be found in the kingdom. In fact, no one knew what a string of rope was like in that remote region of the world. Brilliant and talented that Farah was, she remembered her days with her father as she had often watched him at work as a spinner. She got sufficient flax collected and spun the necessary quantity of rope.

"Now I need some strong cloth," she said. But the people of the realm had none of the kind she wanted for the tent. Now drawing upon her experience with the weavers, she made the required cloth.

"Now wherefrom will I get some sturdy tent-poles?" she pondered.

Alas, none was found to her liking and requirement. She remembered with gratitude how she had been trained by the old wood-fashioner to make ship masts. So with help of the king's men, she sawed some logs to size and made the staffs.

Finally she recollected the different tents she had come across during her travels. With her skill and cleverness she adapted the best feature of each type and created a splendid tenthause.

"Wonderful! Wonderful!" exclaimed the king in great admiration. "You're indeed

fit to be my daughter-in-law! The prize I had thought for the girl who would fulfill my wish!"

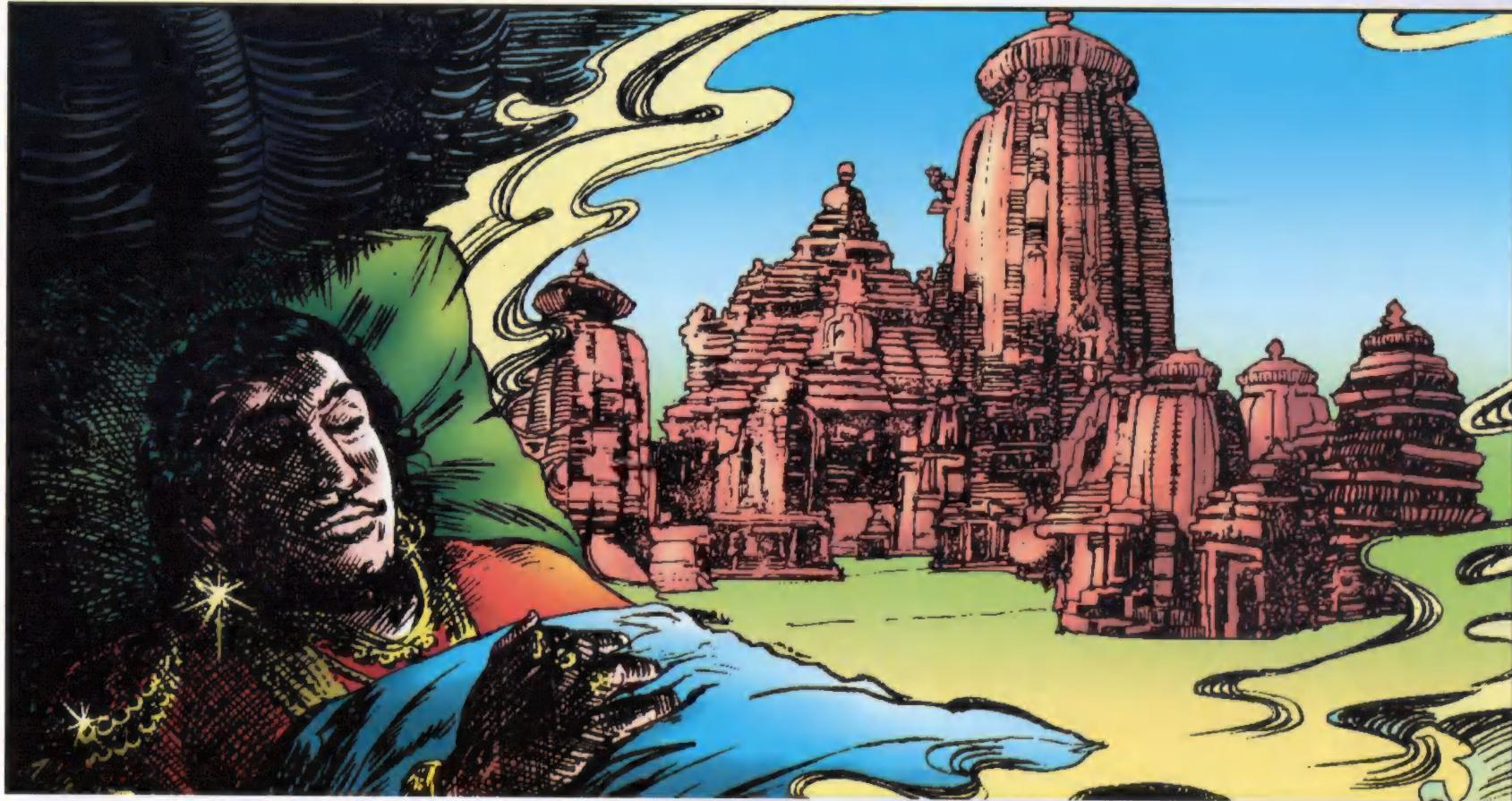
So Farah married the prince amidst fanfare and jubilation. It was before long that she became the queen of the island and was loved by one and all.

Often, she would recount her adventures to her jolly little children. Sitting around her in the garden, she would round up by saying, "My dear little ones, never take lightly the events and happenings that come your way!"

"Why, mother?" they would ask in a chorus.

"My angels, all that happens in your life, all your experiences, can indeed have a purpose and might one day come to your aid. As in my life, what was once unpleasant, ultimately played a role in making me what I am!"

The Saga of Sri Jagannath





The Saga of Sri Jagannath

Puri, in the eastern part of India, the abode of Lord Jagannath, is one of the four Dhams or holy places of great antiquity in the country, the other three being Badarikashram in the north, Rameswaram in the south and Dwarka in the west. While there is no uncertainty about the identity of the deities of these three Dhams, they being Vishnu, Shiva and Krishna respectively, Sri Jagannath, the deity with a mysterious form, had been claimed in different ages, by devotees of different faiths, as their god. However, the oldest and the most widely accepted legends suggest that the deity represents Krishna.

The origin of this deity is not only lost in the mist of Time, but also remains shrouded in mystery. Legend says that a certain sacred object was being secretly worshipped by a tribal chief, Visvavasu. King Indradymna, through one of his trusted emissaries, got it transported to Puri. Yet, he commissioned a mysterious craftsman to carve an image of the main deity. That means what the emissary brought was not an image, but something that seems to have been lodged inside the image as we see it today. What was that? Could that be the sacred Relics of Krishna? That is the conclusion to which the chain of legends that follows leads us.

The great temple we see today is old enough, but obviously, far older temples preceded it, for the deity belongs to a remote past.



King Indradyumna was most dear to his subjects. He was great in many respects. Bards sang his praise in many verses. So many smaller kings paid their tributes to him.

He had plenty of wealth to bestow rewards on scholars and poets and to give alms to the needy. He made all happy.

But lately, he was found to be a bit unhappy himself. Is it because he lacked anything? Is it because some of his desires remained unfulfilled?

No. Why was he unhappy then? At the beginning he could not have answered the question himself. But slowly the answer dawned on his mind. Like a temple on the horizon becoming visible when the mist disappears, the vagueness in his mind gradually gave way to a distinct vision.

Indeed, it was a lofty vision—the vision of a temple. He must build a magnificent temple, a great shrine that would be a seat of pilgrimage for millions of devotees for ages to come.

But a temple for whom? Who is the deity to be enshrined in it? Was it not strange one should feel the urge to build a temple when one was not sure of the deity to be worshipped in it? The king himself wondered.

But he was not required to wonder for long. He heard a voice in his dream: "Build the temple. You will find the deity when it is time."

King Indradyumna woke up, his nerves tingling with a sublime feeling. There was no longer any hesitation in him. He summoned his ministers as soon as it was morning and revealed to them his decision to build the temple. Astrologers were asked to locate the right place for the temple and

to find out the most auspicious time and day for the foundation-laying ceremony. Amidst sounds of conch-shells and chanting of hymns, the project was launched on the wide seashore of Puri.

Huge blocks of stone of a special quality were collected from mountains far away. They came by boats through the sea and the river and were brought to the site loaded on huge carts drawn by elephants.

Thousands of workers, craftsmen, sculptors and architects were busy constructing the monument. The magic of their love and labour made flowers bloom on the stones. Upon a vast stretch of sand kissed by the sea-waves, the monument rose higher and higher, befriending the clouds.

Years passed and the temple was completed. But where is the deity? That is the question everybody began asking.

Although the king did not show it, he too was growing anxious on the issue. One day he sat inside the new temple and, looking at the inner chamber designed to house the deity, prayed to God, "In what form will you like to dwell in this temple? Is it not time I was told about it? How long to wait? Won't all the people laugh at me if this

huge temple, built with so much labour and care, remains empty for a long time?"

That very night, in his dream, the king was told that somewhere, not far from Puri, lay hidden the deity for whom the temple had been made. He was Krishna and He waited to be discovered!

The king knew that it was not going to be easy to discover the deity, for to play hide-and-seek was Krishna's nature! One, to be able to find him, must be intelligent, wise and a devotee of the Lord. The King selected four worthy scholars from his court and sent them in four directions.

The youngest of them, Vidyapati, went eastward and then took a turn towards the north. Soon he entered a wild forest. He could have surely avoided it, but he was not acting according to his own will. From time to time, he prayed to Krishna. He felt as if his prayer was leading him in a certain direction!

So he braved into the forest which was growing thicker and thicker. He came across a small hill. To his surprise, it appeared to be a musical hill! Tender sounds of drum and flute, of clapping of hands and songs, seemed to be emanating from the hill. It did not of course take him long to understand

that the music came from the other side of the hill.

He climbed the hill. A slope led into a beautiful valley. A dozen of tribal girls were dancing and singing. Vidyapati was tired. The melody and the sight worked like a tonic on him. He stood holding a branch, enjoying the scene.

He received a jolt when he heard a tiger roar close by. The beast was not satisfied with its roar, it was rushing towards him. Vidyapati was not so good at climbing trees. He panicked and just did not know what to do.

"Bagha!" the shout came from one of the dancing maids. The tiger stopped at once. The girls giggled. "Come back!" commanded the same voice. Bagha turned and in a bound was back amidst the girls who had stopped dancing. It rolled at the feet of the one who had called it, like a pussy. She gave it a smack with her fist. She indeed outshone all the other girls of the group for her charming personality.

Vidyapati, tired and frightened, sat dazed. Two of the girls fanned him with banana leaves. Another fetched cool water from a spring and offered it to him. Two of them supported him with their arms.



They did all this in obedience to the instructions from one who outshone the rest. She was tall, articulate in her manners, and beautiful. Her friends called her Lalita.

"O stranger," said Lalita, kneeling down before Vidyapati, "we do not know who you are and what is your destination. Probably you strayed into the forest. Whatever be the case, we cannot desert you in the condition that you are. My father, Visvavasu, Chieftain of this forest, will be happy to receive you as his guest." There



was magic in Lalita's invitation, though she did not say a word more than necessary. In the silence that followed, Vidyapati stood up gratefully, ready to follow Lalita.

Lalita led the party, her pet tiger prancing about merrily and occasionally nosing the stranger. Lalita whispered a message to one of her companions. She speeded up her steps and then ran and soon disappeared amidst the cluster of trees. Vidyapati guessed that Lalita had sent the

girl to intimate the father about the stranger she was taking home.

Soon he saw Visvavasu emerging on a rock. He looked majestic, but he greeted Vidyapati with folded hands, "You are welcome, whoever you are," he said when Vidyapati returned his greetings.

"I'm duty-bound to inform my noble host that I am an emissary of King Indradyumna. I hope, my host will appreciate that I am also duty-bound to my king to keep my mission a secret," said Vidyapati. Visvavasu was delighted to find out that the young Brahmin was a great scholar. The chieftain had rarely any opportunity to meet and benefit from a scholar. He requested Vidyapati to stay with him for a few days and to enlighten him in matters of religion and philosophy.

Vidyapati agreed to comply with the request. Surely, he had a strong feeling that he ought to continue there.

Had this feeling something to do with the great attention Lalita, Visvavasu's only child, bestowed on him? Not quite at the beginning. While Vidyapati recited scriptures and explained the meaning, both Visvavasu and Lalita listened in rapt attention. Vidyapati knew that Lalita

admired him, but he was in no mood to think of her much. He did not forget, even for a moment, why he was there. Most of the time he remained silent and meditative. He had come in search of some secret divinity. Will he succeed in his quest? That was his worry.

But he forgot his worry for some days. It was when he fell ill and Lalita nursed him. He suffered, but his elation at his close contact with Lalita far surpassed his suffering.

He realised that not only Lalita loved him, but also he loved Lalita. No wonder that he should give his silent consent to Visvavasu's proposal that he be married to Lalita.

It was spring and the whole nature was agog with love that burst forth in a million flowers and lush green leaves. Vidyapati's marriage with Lalita was performed amidst the joyous songs of the tribal maids and the sweetly taunting cuckoos.

Days passed. Vidyapati was both happy and unhappy. Happy he was for Lalita, unhappy for his mission that remained unfulfilled.

Only if he could be as determined a worker as Visvavasu! For example, he had

observed Visvavasu going out somewhere at dawn without fail, to come back after the sunrise. Even a terrible cyclone would not stop him from this.

Suddenly Vidyapati grew curious about it. Where does Visvavasu go?

And he put the question to Lalita.

"O my husband, I am not supposed to disclose that to anybody. But how on earth can I keep anything hidden from you? Somewhere nearby there is a cave. Inside it there is our ancestral deity. My father goes to pay his homage to Him. My father's father, my grandfather, even my grandfather's father, did the same," replied the innocent Lalita.

Vidyapati heard her with rapt attention and great curiosity. Is the unforeseen hand that had led him there now trying to lead him a step farther?

"My dear Lalita," he said softly. "Can't I have a glimpse of the deity?"

"Don't have any such desire, my husband, for my father would never consent to let any outsider even know of the deity, what to speak of showing the deity to him!"

"Do I continue to be an outsider even after marrying you?" Vidyapati feigned sadness.

"Oh no. I'll surely plead with my father to take you there."

At night, Lalita told Visvavasu of her husband's desire. Visvavasu cast a severe look at her and kept quiet.

But Lalita was not to give up so easily. "Father, am I not your only child? Who will worship the deity after you? Won't the duty rest on Vidyapati? What is the harm in familiarising him with the deity now?" she persisted in her pleading.

"Will your husband stay with us in this forest forever?" Visvavasu asked gravely.

"Of course he will if you don't disappoint him, if you love him like your son!"

"Even then he belongs to another culture, another world. But, my child, I will fulfil his desire. It is for your sake."

But Visvavasu was oath-bound not to show anybody the way to the cave, unless it was time for him to hand over the charge of his deity to someone. Vidyapati agreed to proceed blindfolded.

As usual, it was the hour before the sunrise when Visvavasu prepared to go to the cave. Vidyapati's eyes were covered by a



pad of cloth. Visvavasu held his right hand and led him on.

Unknown to Visvavasu and even unknown to Lalita, Vidyapati carried a handful of mustard seeds in his left hand. He went on scattering them along the way to the cave.

"My boy, lower your head. We are now entering the cave," said Visvavasu and he gently removed the cover from Vidyapati's eyes.

Vidyapati opened his eyes in the dark interior. His eyes went to a nook of the



cave. There, on a slab of stone, Visvavasu placed some flowers.

Instantly there flashed a blue light. Vidyapati saw in the flash the vision of Krishna—the beautiful Krishna with his flute.

A cry of joy and wonder escaped his lips.

"What happened, my son?" asked Visvavasu. That brought Vidyapati back to senses.

Visvavasu was a man of few words. When he realised that Vidyapati was not willing to say why he was so surprised, he did not repeat his question.

Vidyapati was brought back home in the same manner he had been led into

the cave—blind-folded. Lalita was eagerly awaiting his return. "What did you see?" she asked excitedly.

"Well, nothing very much! What miracle can one expect inside a gloomy cave?" said Vidyapati.

Indeed, he must not tell even Lalita the miracle he had experienced. He alone knew how painful it was to keep it a secret from her. Never before in life he had suffered so much anguish. The king had vested in him a great trust. He knew very well that Indradyumna was no ordinary king, but one who had been inspired to accomplish a great task. It is true he should not keep anything hidden from Lalita, but who was Lalita, after all? He met her and married her only because he had set out on his mission. Shouldn't his first obligation be to his mission?

But the matter was much more serious than merely keeping something hidden from Lalita. He realised that what Visvavasu worships is the symbol of Vishnu. If he is to be faithful to his mission, he must decamp with the object that Visvavasu worships! That will be betraying the faith of Lalita and Visvavasu! That will be treachery!

He argued with himself: Visvavasu did not trust him. Had he trusted him, he would not have obliged him to visit the cave blind-folded. So Vidyapati will only outwit Visvavasu, not betray him.

But arguments are arguments. They cannot truly resolve any conflict. Vidyapati could not sleep for nights together. He remained absentminded during the day. Lalita was at a loss to understand what was happening to her husband. Was he unhappy because he married her? Was he missing the pomp and show of the life in the king's court?

"Not the pomp and show, Lalita," Vidyapati at last told Lalita in reply to her repeated query, "but my home. A long time has lapsed since I left the city. My people must be wondering where I am. Should I not see my anxious parents? I am pensive at the thought of leaving you. Surely, I cannot propose that you accompany me. Your father will miss you so much! Besides, people of my society will look at you with such curiosity that you'll feel quite uncomfortable."

"How do I care as long as you continue to look at me the way you do now!" Lalita's voice was clear, but soon it

grew weak when she said, "But who will look after father? Can I leave him?"

"You cannot and you should not. But if you allow me to go, I'll come back soon."

"Will you? Do you promise?"

"How can I do otherwise, Lalita? Can I remain without you?"

Vidyapati's words brought tears to Lalita's eyes. "Go then," she said. "Tell your parents how eagerly I look forward to the day when I can be blessed by them."

Soon Visvavasu was informed of Vidyapati's desire to go home. He proposed to send many gifts with him. "No," said Vidyapati dissuading him. "There will be a time for that—when Lalita will accompany me. First, let me break the news of my marriage to my parents."

"Let it be so," said Visvavasu and he arranged a horse for his son-in-law.

The monsoon had just set in. Vidyapati took leave of Visvavasu and a tearful Lalita. Slowly he disappeared from their sight.

It was not difficult for him to find the row of tender sprouts that had emerged from the mustard seeds he had scattered.

He followed the path they indicated. In a few minutes he reached the cave. At its mouth, rocks were placed in an intricate fashion to check one's entry into it. Vidyapati dismounted from his horse and made his way carefully.

Inside the cave, he was thrilled once again. There was no time to lose. "O God, I'm acting according to the best of my inspiration. If I'm doing wrong, pardon me."

He picked up the small stone casket on which Visvavasu had placed flowers hours ago. He put it in his bag, went out and hopped onto his horse. He then galloped at great speed. Though not sure of the way, he had the feeling that some superior force will guide him out of the forest all right.

Vidyapati crossed the forest in a few hours. Tired, he dismounted from his horse and ate the food Lalita had so lovingly packed for him. Visvavasu would not know of the theft until the next day. It is only when he would visit the cave at dawn, with a handful of flowers, that he would find his Deity gone! By that time, Vidyapati should have safely reached his destination.

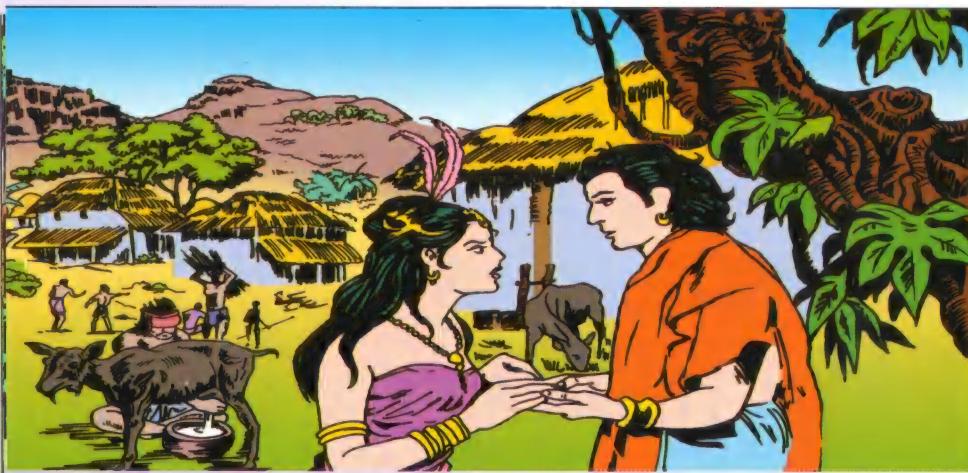
Vidyapati was happy that he had accomplished his mission. He was happy



that he had come out of the dark forest into the plains flooded by sunlight.

But as soon as he looked at the forest he had left behind, his heart was overcast by gloom. It is true that he had accomplished his mission, but at what cost? Had he not betrayed the trust of the kind-hearted Visvavasu and the innocent Lalita? Visvavasu will no doubt be heart-broken. Can Lalita stand the shock of his betrayal and the anguish of her father?

"O God!" muttered Vidyapati, "I had to do what I have done. But, was not my



act mean, treacherous and unpardonable? Only if this act serves some greater purpose, something ordained by Thou, can I recover my peace."

He then remembered Visvavasu and Lalita and silently begged of their pardon.

He hopped onto his horse and galloped forth, struggling with his gloom. Faster and faster he rode, as if thereby he could leave his tormenting thoughts behind!

By sundown, he approached the charming town of Puri. Straight he went to the palace of Indradyumna. An official who had spotted him at a distance had already rushed to the palace ahead of him to

inform the king of his arrival. He knew how anxiously the king awaited him.

King Indradyumna came out hurriedly and embraced Vidyapati. "Young sage, not only your bright face, but also the dream I dreamt last night tells me that you have not returned empty-handed. You have brought the thing for which I have been waiting so eagerly—counting every moment and passing sleepless nights."

"My lord, I'm convinced that I've got the invaluable thing for which I set out, but ..." Vidyapati's voice was choked.

"Go on, my friend, I know that no one can achieve anything really great without confronting some difficulty or obstacle. Let us hear your problem. We will do everything possible to resolve it," said the king in great earnest.

Vidyapati shook his head. "No, no, my lord, none can help me come out of my anguish. I had to steal the object of my quest, and that too from one who was my host, my benefactor and whose daughter I married. I betrayed the father and the daughter. I shudder at the thought of their shock when they shall come to know of my betrayal. That will be in the morning."

"Vidyapati, you must root out such disturbing thoughts from your mind. Thousands of artisans have offered their labour to the building of the temple. We have offered our resources. Similarly, if someone has been obliged to lose something he valued, what is wrong in that? I am directed in my dream to await a log that will come floating in the sea by morning. What you have brought is charged with the presence of Vishnu. Am I right? This is to be placed inside the image that will be carved out of the log. Once the image is installed in the magnificent temple, your host will be only too happy to see it," said the king, patting Vidyapati on the back.

Vidyapati felt consoled.

The king, his ministers and Vidyapati were all present on the seashore an hour before dawn. A mild mist spread on the waters and it had dimmed the horizon.

By and by, the eastern sky grew rosy. The king looked agog with excitement as if the sunrise was taking place for the first ever time!

The sun sprang up. The waves recorded a million golden ripples. The mist began to fade.

"There! There it is!!" cried out the excited king. "Can't you all see it rolling over the waves?"

A huge round log was seen rising with the surging waves and gliding down as the waves subsided. At the king pointing it out, a dozen waiting boats dashed into the sea.

They surrounded the dancing log. Men in the boats leaned towards it and began pushing it towards the shore. A floating log needed but a little push to move!

But the log would not move. Some of the surprised boatmen, expert swimmers, jumped into the waters and tried to move it, but in vain. The boats came closer and pressed against the log, but there was no change in the log's position.

The men then threw ropes around the log and pulled it towards the shore. When that yielded no result, more ropes were brought and fastened to it. Bigger boats were pressed to service, but the situation remained unchanged.

The king's face paled as time passed. The ministers were worried. Soldiers were summoned. They did their best to bring the log ashore, but they failed.

"Whoever has heard of a floating log proving heavier than a hill!" said the king. "There is something wrong—not with the log, but with us. However, I'll not budge until the log has been brought ashore. I hope it does not drift away!" said the king.

The day passed and the evening made way for the night.

Riding a golden palanquin came Queen Gundicha. "You don't mean to pass your night in the open!" she complained to her husband mildly.

"I don't really know what I am going to do!" answered the king in a kind of daze. He closed his eyes.

It was a moonlit night. Soldiers and boatmen were still trying their strength against the strange log.

"Stop!" shouted the king suddenly. The ministers passed the order on to those struggling with the log. "I know why the log refuses to come," said the king. Then, looking at Vidyapati, he said, "Lead me to the blessed devotee who was the custodian of the sacred thing you've brought. His touch alone will move the log!"

From the top of the mountain, the forest looked like rolling waves that had

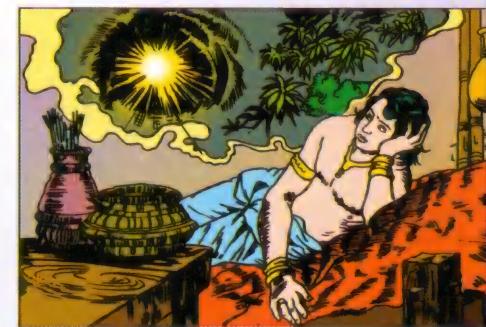
come to halt under some spell. The lush green trees covered a range of hills not too high. Between the hills spread sleepy tribal hamlets, the realm of Visvavasu.

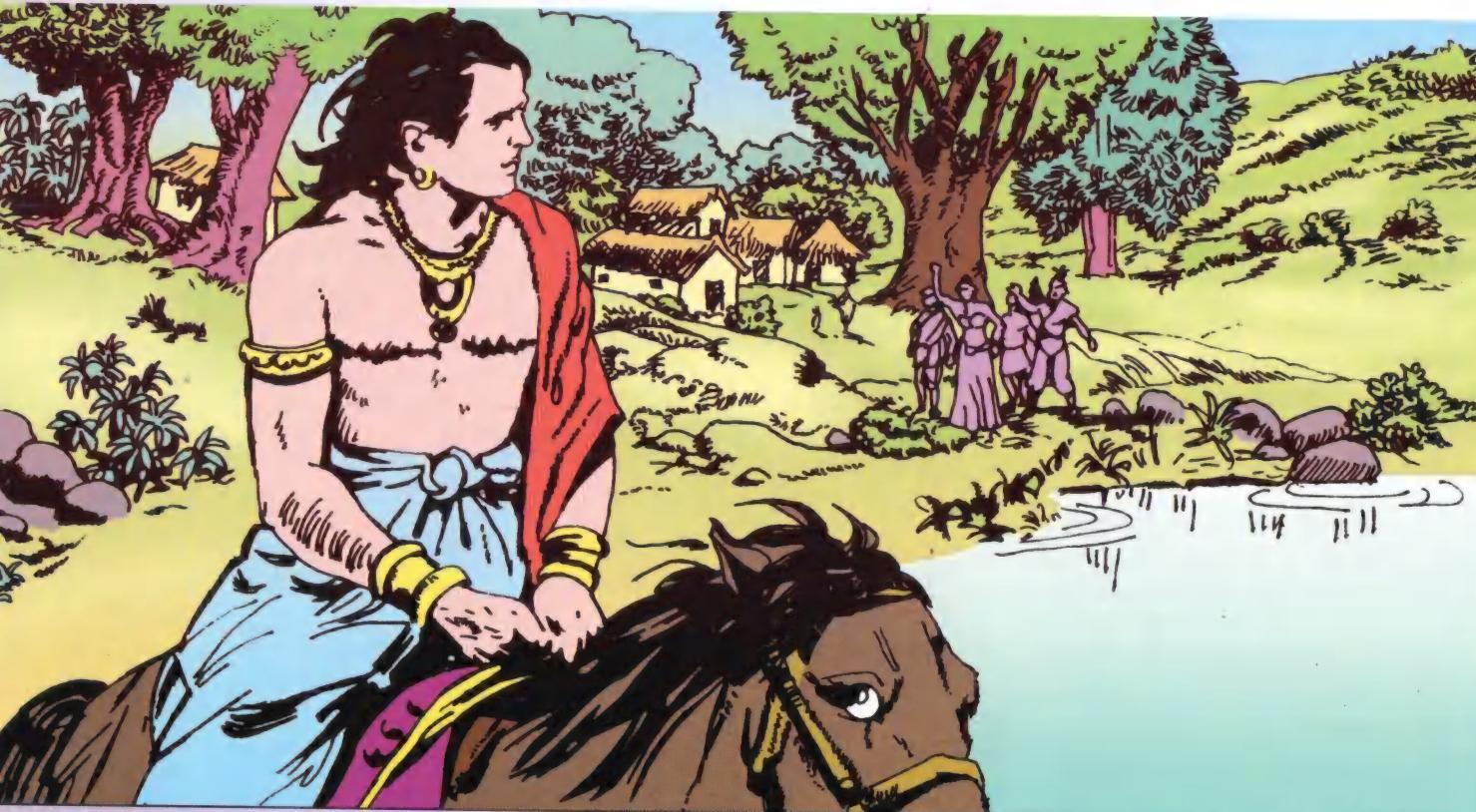
It had been a quiet realm always, and since the previous day, it had grown quieter still. That was natural. Their chief, Visvavasu, lay in a swoon most of the time. The chief's daughter, Lalita, wept continuously.

Nobody knew exactly what had happened. As usual, Visvavasu had gone out of his house at dawn. But that day, he returned soon, looking wild, panting and sweating. "What has your husband done?" That was all he could say, staring at Lalita at the foreyard of their house. Then he swooned.

At first stupefied, Lalita cried in her horror and sat down by her father's side. Others came rushing to the spot. They carried their chief into his room and sprinkled water on his face. He recovered his senses, only to lose them again.

Lalita had instinctively understood what had happened. She had always a feeling that although Vidyapati loved her deeply, his readiness to live with them in the forest was not entirely due to it. He





was counting days for a chance to fulfil some other mission. Visvavasu's shock had only one meaning for Lalita: Vidyapati had escaped with their secret Deity for which he had evinced such keen interest.

The day passed and so did pass the night, without the father and the daughter touching food or going to sleep. The next

morning, Visvavasu walked towards the cave, in a daze, although he knew that the cave was empty. He was followed by his kinsmen.

Inside the cave, he grasped the stone upon which his Deity used to be there and refused to budge. Hours passed. Those who accompanied him did not know what to do.

And then, someone came running at noon and told them excitedly that he had sighted a party of strangers atop the hill. The one who dominated the party looked like a king.

Soon another messenger reported of having sighted Vidyapati in the party.

By then, everybody had come to know, through whispers, the cause of Visvavasu's sorrow.

"They have taken away our greatest possession. Are they not satisfied still and do they mean to plunder us? We will fight to the last man!" shouted a few voices.

But as more reports began to arrive, it became clear that the king's party carried no arms. The king himself had already told some people that he was coming to greet Visvavasu.

Visvavasu came out of the cave to receive the king, though he had not stopped weeping. The king, on sighting him, came running and embraced him.

"Visvavasu, I am the thief, not your son-in-law. Pardon me and listen to me with kindness," said the king. He then narrated how he got the inspiration to construct a magnificent temple, how he had had the

feeling that somewhere, not far from Puri, there was a secret object of worship that must be gathered for the temple and how, of all his counsellors, Vidyapati alone had a feel for things divine.

"Visvavasu, for generations, the Lord had been gracious to your dynasty. Now it is the Lord's wish that He should be available to all the seekers. In any case, He does not wish to be seen by others in the same form as you and your forefathers saw Him. What you worshipped will be kept inside a new image that will be carved out of a block of log," said the king. He then told him how the log refused to come ashore and how he felt sure that it would come only if Visvavasu was there to receive it. The Lord knew in what a state of anguish his dear devotee, Visvavasu, was. The work could not go on unless Visvavasu decided to lend his support to it.

Visvavasu heard the king with rapt attention. He was left in no doubt that what the king said was true. He sat silent for long. Then he stood up. "I am ready to follow you," he said.

The king embraced him again, tears of joy and gratefulness streaming down his cheeks.

"My daughter, do not misunderstand your husband. It is only for a lofty cause that he kept certain things secret from you," the king told Lalita, who bowed to him.

"Lalita, I apologise to you. I will be back in no time and arrange for you to accompany me to Puri," Vidyapati told Lalita who had not stopped weeping.

It was evening when the king and his party, along with Visvavasu, reached Puri. At once the king and Visvavasu set out into the sea in a boat. Lo and behold, as soon as they touched the floating log and gave it a push, it began moving towards the shore, dancing on the waves. Within minutes, the jubilant crowd rolled it on to the sands and then it was carried to the castle.

What form will the Deity take? That was the question to bother the king next. He summoned the kingdom's leading craftsmen. They said that they were in the habit of carving images out of stone—following some established designs. They were not sure of their craftsmanship on a block of log, particularly when it concerned the image of a Deity.

Before long, an old man appeared before the king and claimed that he knew what to carve out of the log. He had been



told in his dream that the Lord wished to be manifested as Krishna, along with his elder brother Balabhadra and their sister, Subhadra. At no other shrine was to be seen this trinity. This will be the exclusive feature of this divinely inspired temple.

The old man's claim carried conviction. The king agreed to his taking up the work.

"But I have a condition, O noble King. I must be left alone with the log and my instruments. The door of the house inside which I will work must remain closed





until I have opened it," said the strange craftsman.

"What about your food?"

"I'll have it after my work is over," calmly stated the stranger.

The minister of the king was not sure that the stranger's mind was quite sound. But the king, surprisingly, agreed to his condition without any hesitation.

The stranger was given a house situated on the castle campus. The faint

sound of his instruments fashioning the wood could be heard if one pressed one's ear against the door. And Queen Gundicha Devi, the consort of King Indradyumna, was never tired of doing that. Time and again, she would appear before the doors and listen to the sound and feel satisfied that the old craftsman went on with his work.

But one day, all seemed quiet inside the house. The queen grew anxious about the stranger's condition. And when the sound did not resume the next day or even the day after, she suspected that the old man, who had deprived himself of food and drink, had died. She pressed open the doors.

The old man, busy with making the images, looked over his shoulder and then, in the twinkling of an eye, vanished. He had left the images incomplete. The images are to be found in the same shape—though from time to time new images took place of the old—to this day. The craftsman, as all concerned realised afterwards, was none other than Visvakarma, the sculptor and architect of heaven. Descendants of Vidyapati and Lalita are among the chief priests of the temple.

But were the images really incomplete? They appear so. They even appear strange to the ordinary eye, but devotees

see in them indescribable beauty and divine grandeur.

What Visvavasu worshipped was perhaps the sacred Relics of Krishna. The Relics are there hidden in the images. Ceremoniously, though secretly, they have been transferred into the new images through the ages. Sri Jagannath, the Lord of the Universe, is one of the prime Deities for the devotees of Vishnu and Puri has been a sacred place of pilgrimage since times immemorial.



Witty Tales





Witty Tales

Chandamama is equally famous for its stories of fun and humour, which are presented in a subtle manner that make them capable of being remembered beyond the time taken for reading them. Tales of men of wit, like Tenali Rama, Birbal, Gopal Bhand and others, have all enriched Indian literature. These stories look at the lighter side of life, revealing human weaknesses, vanities and foibles. If they evoke a smile while reading, they continue to remind the readers of the absurdities in life.





The Clever Parrot

There was a great merchant in Magadha who traded overseas.

Whenever he went abroad, he would call his family and ask each one, "What shall I bring for you?"

On one occasion, he asked his pet parrot too, "What shall I bring for you?"

"Do you remember the forest in which you caught me?" the parrot said. "In that forest there is a giant pipal tree. On it you will find numerous parrots like me. Tell them that I am with you and ask them for

a message for me. That is all I want from you."

The merchant started on a voyage, traded for a period of six months, and then went to the pipal tree to meet the parrots. He told them what his pet had said. When he asked for a message, one of the parrots became lifeless and fell down and the rest flew off without answering the merchant.

Surprised and disappointed, the merchant came home and told his parrot what had happened.

On hearing the merchant's narration, the parrot in the cage had a fit, at the end of which it too fell down lifeless. Shocked at this, the merchant opened the door of the cage. At once the parrot came back to life and flew away through the open cage, leaving the merchant shocked and dumbfounded.





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Abdullah the Wise One

In an Arab country, there lived a scholar named Abdullah. He had a poorly-paid job as a letter-writer in the palace of Sudam the Sultan and could hardly feed himself and his family. One day, a great feast was arranged in honour of the Sultan's birthday, and when Abdullah breathed in the delicious smells of cooking, he was sure that he and his family would be invited.

Abdullah, however, was sadly disappointed. There were no invitations for him and his family. "Nobody thinks anything of me," he sighed, as he went home hungry.

Very sad, he went to bed, but in the middle of the night he woke his wife up. "I have an idea that will make me rich and famous," he told his wife. "I shall become a wise man who knows everything."

He got up and went secretly to the Sultan's stable and took away Sudam's favourite white horse, which he led into a thick forest and tied to a tree.

"Now, my dear wife," he said, "you must go to the palace and spread the news that I am Abdullah, the wise one."

The wife obeyed. Next day she was in the palace and saw the Sultan looking worried. "What is wrong?" she asked.

"My finest horse vanished in the night," Sultan Sudam replied. "Nobody can tell me where it is."

"Abdullah, my husband, is a wise man who sees and knows everything," said the wife. "Alas, today he is in bed, being weak through lack of food."

"Perhaps the poor man will be well enough to talk," said the Sultan eagerly, and he hurried straight to Abdullah's house. The scholar seemed to be faint and weak but found strength to whisper that the Sultan would find his horse deep in the thick forest, tied to a tree.

When this was found to be true, the Sultan was overjoyed and, for the next few days, Abdullah and his family had all the money and food they wanted. But news

got round that a wonderful wise man had appeared and even the King of the Arab countries got to know about it.

The King summoned Abdullah to him. "Wise man," he said, "a thief has stolen the crown jewels and only you can find them for me. By tomorrow morning you must give me the answer, or I shall have you severely punished as a fake."

"Poor Abdullah! His teeth were chattering with fright as they took him to a room in a high tower and shut him in. "How can I know the answer?" he wailed.

The jewel-thief was a serving-woman in the court, named Giva. She heard about the wise man and tiptoed to the room in the tower and listened outside the door.

Not knowing that anybody was listening, Abdullah was on his knees, bewailing his fate. "It is all the fault of my tongue," he sobbed. "Yes, that is the truth," he went on in a louder voice. "The fault is that of giva." Being a clever scholar, Abdullah used the very ancient Arab word "giva" for "tongue", and when the woman heard it, she naturally thought that Abdullah was mentioning her own name.

She rushed in and went down on her knees before him. "It is true," she cried. "I, Giva, stole the jewels. I beg you to spare my

life, O wise one. The jewels are hidden at the foot of a pomegranate tree in the garden."

"You deserve to be punished," said Abdullah. "I will give you a chance, however, if you leave the country."

This, the woman was only too eager to do. The next day, when Abdullah was brought before the King, he boldly declared that the stolen jewels would be found beneath the pomegranate tree. "Send a trusted servant to dig there," he said. "As for the blame, the thief will never be caught."

When all this was found to be true, the King was amazed. But one of the courtiers wanted even more proof of the clever powers of Abdullah. "Your Majesty," he whispered, "this man might be in league with the thief. We must test him again."

The King agreed, and while Abdullah was sent to another room, he ordered that a frog should be placed inside a golden dish with a lid over it.

Then Abdullah was brought in. "Tell me, O wise one, what is hidden inside this dish," commanded the King.

Abdullah trembled with fear. "Now I am lost, poor little frog that I am," he thought, using a nickname that his father



had given him. Then, half-aloud, he went on, "Poor little frog indeed! Now you are in a trap and who can help you escape?"

All who heard him were astonished. "Now do you believe?" thundered the King to his courtiers. "This man is the wisest in all the land."

Loaded with presents and money that would last him the rest of his life, Abdullah hurried back home, wise in the knowledge that he had also been the lucky one.





The Two Misers

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Many years ago, there was a miser, and he certainly was a miser. Having to spend even the smallest coin caused him considerable pain, and he would spend hours and hours thinking of ways in which he could keep his hoard of money from ever diminishing.

One day, he heard that there was a miser living in a nearby town who never spent anything at all. This sounded good, so our miser decided he would pay a visit to this outstanding man and learn the secret of his success.

It was a long, back breaking walk to the town where the other miser lived, especially

as our miser walked barefoot in order to save his sandals from wearing out.

Eventually, he reached his destination and met this great miser, who greeted him as a long lost brother, and invited him to a meal.

This certainly shook our miser, who protested most volubly, "No, no, I have a piece of dry bread in my pocket, which is all I require."

"That will not do," the great miser said, taking his newly found friend by the arm. "Come with me, and we shall dine out."

First they went to the bakery, where the great miser enquired for fresh bread.

"My good men," the baker said, "I have bread that will melt like butter in the mouth."

"Ah!," said the great miser. "Then what we need is butter not bread."

So, off our misers went to the dairy, where the great miser enquired the price of butter.

The dairyman exclaimed. "My butter is good. It's just like ghee."

"In that case," muttered the great miser, "perhaps it would be better to have ghee."

"I have plenty of ghee," said the dairyman. "Good ghee, as clear as water."

"Then," said the great miser to the other miser, "Let us drink water, which will be as clear as ghee."

So the two misers returned to the house, and the great miser poured out some water, which they drank with great relish.

Our miser returned home, congratulating himself on the good fortune of having met someone who had showed him that water was as good as anything for a meal.

Fortune in Beard



nce upon a time there was a man called Som who had a lovely long beard. Naturally, he was very proud of this and loved to boast that he had the best beard in the area, but his wife was very vexed because he would not chop it off. One day she said, "Why don't you cut off this horrible growth? Of what use is it to you?"

Som laughed and replied, "Dear, don't be silly. My beard will fetch me a fat profit. You just wait and see. My beard is to me what the corn stalks are to the field."

His wife remarked, "Pooh! What nonsense you talk! As if anyone will buy your beard off you!"

Som chuckled, "Oho! No ordinary man can buy my beard. Only our king can afford to buy my beard. Then I'll get a lot of money and there'll be an end to our poverty."

This conversation between the husband and wife was carried on loudly enough for anyone in the street to hear. Therefore, it was not surprising that the king and his minister, who were doing their nightly rounds in disguise, heard it.

Next day, Som was summoned to the royal court. Perplexed in the extreme and afraid he might have offended the king in some manner, Som begged the guard for some time so that he could make himself presentable. But the guard would not listen to him and brought him before the king.

In the court, the minister addressed Som, "Som, the king wants to buy the fine corn stalks waving on your face. What price do you ask for them?"

Som fell at his feet and said, "Sire, I was only joking. Forgive me and I shall never again speak like this."

The minister laughed encouragingly. "Don't be afraid, Som. In truth, the king wishes to buy your fine beard."

Som replied, "Sire, I had no money to pay the barber. That's why I grew a beard. I thought I would buy my wife a saree with the money thus saved."

The minister said patiently. "My dear fellow, I am not joking. Sell your beard to us. Come, what price will you take?"



Emboldened by this, Som replied, "Sire, ten rupees would be enough."

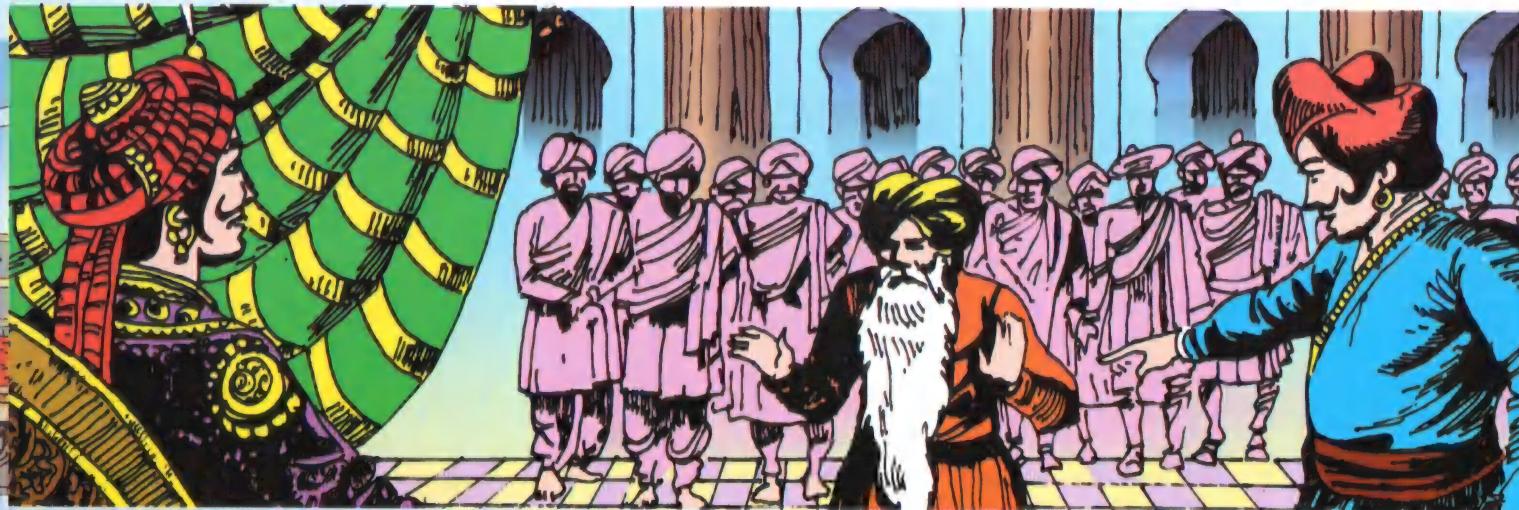
The minister gave him ten rupees, and Som parted with his lovely long beard.

On reaching home, he called his wife who took some time to recognise him, so vast was the difference between the shaggy unkempt husband and the now smooth-shaven, handsome looking man who faced her.

Som boasted, "See, I told you, I'd make a fortune from my beard? My beard is my grain-field. The king paid ten rupees for that. Of course, he would have paid any amount I asked for."

Now, Som's neighbour's wife eavesdropped on their conversation. Her husband too had a bushy beard. That





night, she told him, "I hear that our king is buying up beards. Our neighbour Som sold his beard and made a profit. Go and sell your beard to the king. But mind, ask for more. Don't be content with ten rupees."

So, Dom, that was the neighbour's name, thought about his wife's proposal and decided to sell his beard. On an appointed day, he presented himself before the king who enquired what he wanted.

Dom replied, "Sire, I understand that you pay well for the corn stalks that grow on the face. Look at my facial corn. See how it bends before the breeze." Then Dom ran his fingers through his beard proudly.

The amused king looked at his minister who asked, "Good man, what price do you ask for your facial corn?"

"I've tended this field for a long time with loving care. Ten thousand rupees is what I ask for this lot," replied Dom.

"I see," said the minister who had correctly gauged the man's greed for money. "Yesterday a simpleton wanted only ten rupees for his harvest. But you are cleverer. Yet you have not informed the Government of this secret business. Obviously you have not paid any taxes so far. Therefore we order you to pay a penalty of ten thousand rupees."

Dom was startled to hear this. At once he fell at the minister's feet and implored him to forgive him.

"Sire, forgive me. Greed blinded my eyes. In truth, I know nothing about any secret business."

The whole Court laughed uproariously at Dom's discomfiture.

The minister said sternly. "Dom, the king helps the poor and the needy in this manner. But a rich man like you should not covet wealth like this. We forgive you because this is your first offence. Don't be jealous of others. Go and let us hear no more about this."

Dom ran from the Court and shut himself up inside his house and refused to see anybody for shame. As for his wife, she stopped her nasty habit of eavesdropping on others.

BY THE WAY

Sri Lankan Prime Minister Premadasa volunteered to write for the magazine, and did so for four issues.



Meaningful Gestures



In days gone by, there was a pundit at Kanchipur, Ram Sharma, who had mastered the unusual art of conveying ideas through gestures instead of words.

One day, Ram Sharma presented himself before the king of a neighbouring country and sought an appointment in his court by the virtue of his knowledge of this rare art.

The king, however, was not impressed with Ram Sharma. To dismiss him, he said, "Well, Pundit, your art is nothing new to us. We have already a scholar who is adept in conveying valuable ideas through gestures."

"Where is he? I would like to meet him," said Ram Sharma with curiosity.

"He is in our academy at Shivgangpur," replied the king.

At Shivgangpur, the king had an educational institution. That was quite far and the king never thought that Ram Sharma would take the trouble of visiting the place.

But Ram Sharma immediately set out for Shivgangpur. On his arrival there, he sought out the principal of the academy and told him what had passed between the king and himself.

The clever principal guessed the situation and said, "Sharmaji! The scholar you desire to meet is now out on a pilgrimage. I have no idea when he will return."

"Never mind. I am willing to wait," answered Ram Sharma and lodged himself comfortably in the academy's guest house.

When the principal saw that his trick did not click, he chose one of the servants of the academy and dressed him like a scholar. The servant had lost one eye. Nevertheless, when properly dressed, he looked grave enough for the occasion.

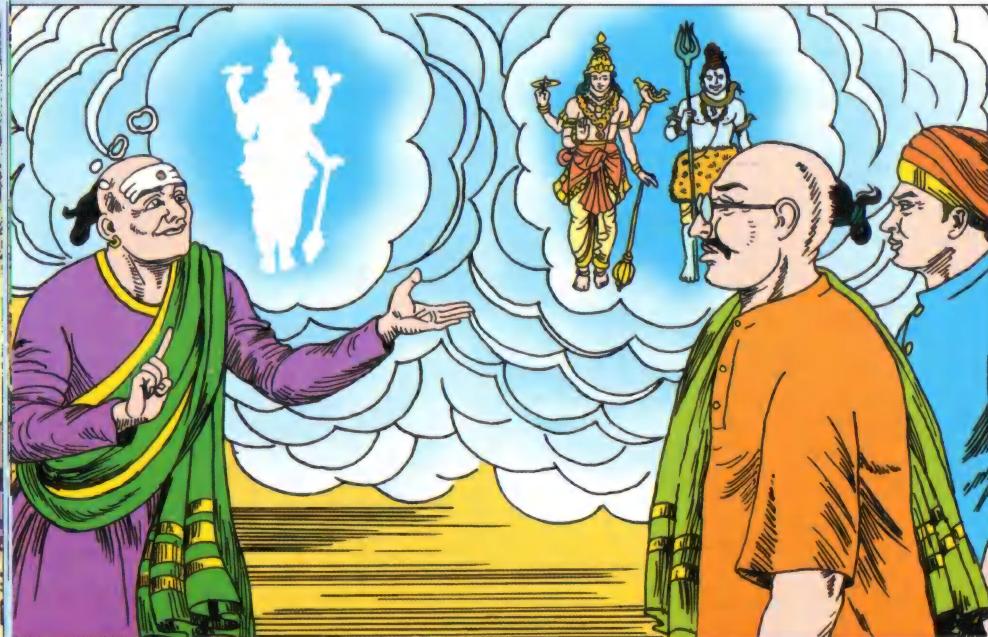
The principal then told Ram Sharma, "Good-news, Sharmaji, the scholar cut short his tour and returned last night. He is waiting for you in the next room. You can meet him and satisfy yourself."

Ram Sharma went to the next room, greeted the disguised servant and, taking his seat, began his communication by showing one finger.

Immediately the servant responded by showing two fingers. Ram Sharma then showed three fingers. The servant, in reply, showed his clenched fist.

Ram Sharma's next move was to take out an apple from his bag and to show it.

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Instantly the servant brought out a piece of bread from his bag and showed it to Sharma.

Ram Sharma bowed down to the servant and left the room. The principal, who met him outside, asked, "Sharmaji, what is your impression of our scholar?"

"A great scholar, indeed!" replied Ram Sharma.

When the principal asked him how he came to such a conclusion, Ram Sharma replied, "The scholar is not only

gifted with ready wit but he is also a sound philosopher. I showed him one finger to mean that God Vishnu governed us all. He replied by showing two fingers, which meant that Vishnu cannot be thought of without Lord Shiva. I then showed three fingers to indicate that in that case, why should we not bring in Brahma too, completing the trinity? To this he replied by showing his fist, which meant all these Gods constituted the one divinity!

"I then showed a nice apple to indicate that we should offer our best things to God. He showed a coarse piece of bread, which meant that God did not mind accepting even a poor offering if it was made sincerely.

"Thus, quite impressed by your scholar, I am leaving for my village," concluded Ram Sharma and, thanking the principal for his hospitality, left.

The principal then called the servant and asked him, "What transpired between you and Ram Sharma?"

"Sir! This Sharma is a very rude fellow. But I snubbed him. As soon as he entered the room, he pointed one finger at me, teasing me for having only one eye. I pointed two fingers at him, indicating that

it won't take me long to pierce the two eyes he vaunted before me. At that the poor fellow looked pale and showed three fingers, perhaps to please me by saying that together we had three eyes after all. His gesture angered me and I showed my fist to tell him that I would smash his head if he made any reference to the eyes any more.

"Ram Sharma was so much afraid that he immediately wanted to please me further by giving me a fruit. But I showed him a piece of bread to mean that as long as I had that, little did I care for his fruit! That put him at his wit's end. He bowed to me and took to his heels."

The principal and others burst into a peal of laughter. In due course, the matter reached the king's ears, who too had no less hearty a laugh.



A Matter of Destiny

Gopalacharya was a well-known scholar. He taught his pupils in front of his house, under a big banyan tree.

One afternoon, in the course of lecturing to his pupils, he said, "If you have a small tumbler with you, it is the same whether you go to a small well or to a big lake. The lake might have a huge quantity of water, but all you can bring is a tumblerful of it. The same principle holds good in regard to your destiny. Whether you go to a mountain of gold or to a deserted cremation ground, you will get what is ordained by your destiny."

We do not know how far Gopalacharya himself believed in this theory, but a young man of the village, named Shivaram, who happened to hear the statement while passing by, was greatly impressed by it.

Shivaram was the son of the village priest. Although he was already in his twenties, he was considered by all as a good-for-nothing lad. However, he did not do any harm to anybody and so people tolerated him, not without some affection.

When Shivaram heard Gopalacharya, he thought, "I don't know where the mountain of gold is situated. But I know

where the cremation ground is. Let me proceed there and find out what is there in my destiny."

He waited till the evening and, after dinner, proceeded towards the cremation ground.

It was a moonlit night. Here and there a few corpses were being burnt. Jackals howled from time to time. Vultures and crows flapped their wings on the treetops. Shivaram lay under a tree and closed his eyes.

Sleep overtook him in no time. At midnight, he felt as though someone was pulling him by his cloth. Sleep, however, was so precious to Shivaram that he did not care to open his eyes.

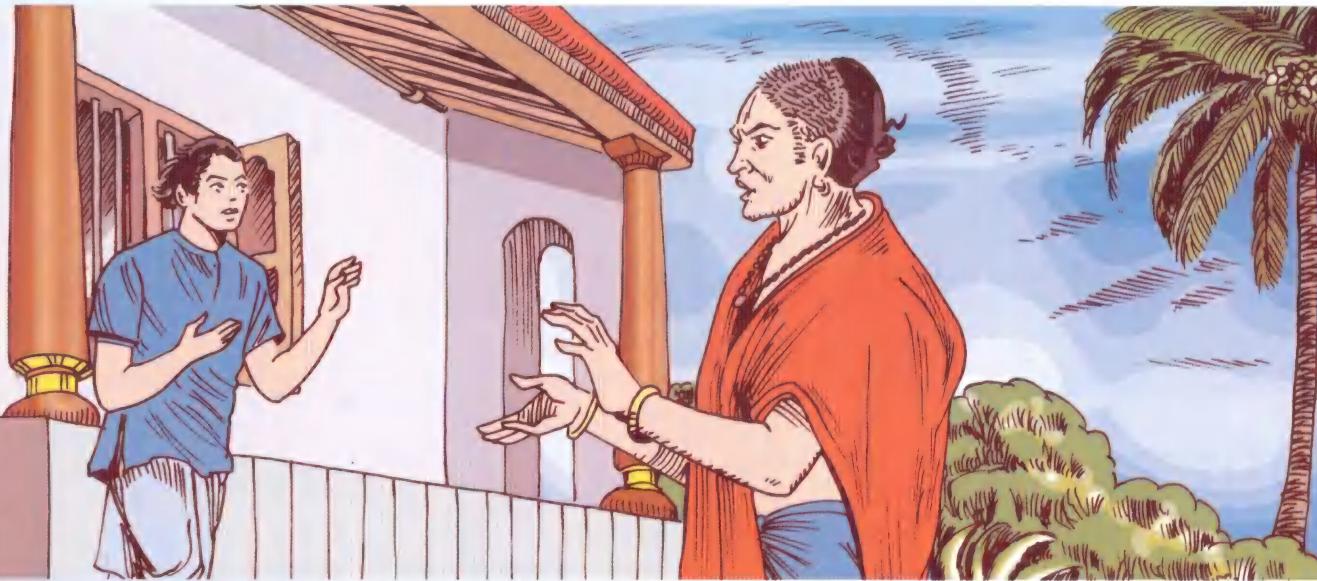
He woke up feeling warm when the sunlight fell on him. Then, to his great joy, he found two pieces of gold lying near his hand.

"So, this much was ordained by my destiny. Not bad!" he told himself.

He returned home and gave the gold to his father, who was as much pleased with the son as surprised.

A year passed. They had built a good house with the money they had received by





selling the gold. One day the priest told his son, "Shivaram! Only if I could get some money, I would like to arrange for your marriage."

"We will get it if it is in our destiny," said Shivaram and at night he proceeded to the cremation ground and slept under the tree.

This time, at midnight, he felt as though he was being dragged away by some beings towards a fire. But he did not open his eyes. Soon he forgot all about it as he was totally immersed in deep sleep. When he opened his eyes in the morning, he found two pieces of gold lying beside him.

He gave the gold to his father. The happy priest began arranging for Shivaram's marriage.

Shivaram was not accustomed to hide anything from anybody. His strange experiences and gains in the cremation ground soon became common knowledge. Gopalacharya too heard the story.

One day Gopalacharya came to meet Shivaram. He said, "My boy! You have gained wealth following a bit of wisdom that flowed from me. Don't you feel any obligation towards me?"

"Well, I should give you a share of what I got, I suppose," said Shivaram.

"Instead of giving me a share, show me the spot where you passed the night and received the gold," pleaded the scholar.

"All right," said Shivaram and he led Gopalacharya to the cremation ground and showed him the spot.

Early in the night, Gopalacharya went to the spot again and lay there closing his eyes. But the atmosphere of the place frightened him. He did not get any sleep till midnight. At last when he got a little sleep, he felt that someone was pulling him. He shrieked and shivered and sat there till it was dawn, without trying to sleep any more.

In the morning, he looked around carefully to see if there was any gold lying nearby. But he saw nothing.

Back in the village, he told Shivaram, "How is it that I got no gold while you got it twice?"

"How can you get it if it is not in your luck? Even if you find a large lake, the water you can carry home will depend on the size of your tumbler, isn't that so?" said Shivaram.





The Bridegroom for Leela

A poor couple had no children. They adopted an orphan girl and she grew up to be a beautiful maiden. She was named Leela.

In a neighbouring village lived a young man, Ravi. He was an able-bodied farmer. He owned an acre of land, which he had turned into a fine orchard. He was prospering well.

One day, Leela's father told her, "There is a young farmer named Ravi who would make a fine husband for you."

"A mere farmer? Don't I deserve anything better, father?" grumbled Leela.

"But Ravi is so nice a choice! I do not know a better man than him!" answered the father.

"My friends say that I deserve the hand of a king or a general," said Leela.

"That is a way of saying that you are beautiful, which no doubt is true. But I am old enough to tell you that one who marries a king or a general is not necessarily happy. Besides, poor man that I am, I cannot find a king or a general for you," said the father.

Leela was not satisfied with her father's explanation. She had grown quite ambitious.

She was often heard making enquiries with her friends about the possibility of her getting married to a rich or influential young man. But her friends did not seem to be of much help.

It was a summer noon and the village streets were quiet. Leela sat alone on the veranda of her house, brooding over her future. Suddenly she heard the sound of a string of horses galloping. She went out into the street to see what was happening. One of the captains of the king's army was going on urgent business, accompanied by some soldiers.

The captain pulled the reins when he saw the maiden. He said that he was thirsty. At his request, Leela fetched a mug of water for him. The captain, on enquiry, learnt that she was not married. "Why not marry me?" he ventured to propose.

"Why not, if my father agrees?" said Leela, "I wanted to marry a king or a general, but a captain would do!"



The captain met Leela's father and expressed his desire to take the girl with him. The father found out that Leela was quite eager to go with him. "You may take her away, if you promise to duly marry her," the father said. The captain promised and made Leela sit behind him and galloped on.

It so happened that on the way the captain met his boss, the king's general. Now, while on an urgent mission, a captain was not expected to carry a maiden with him. The discovery could cost him his position. The captain, who knew well the general's nature, got off his horse and, bowing to him, said, "This maiden desired to marry a king or a general. That is why I thought it wise to bring her to your notice."

"Hm!" uttered the general gravely and, surveying the girl, said, "I don't mind marrying her. Put her on my horse."

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Leela was transferred from the captain's horse to the general's. But they had not gone far when they came across the king, quite unexpectedly.

"Who is this maiden, general?" queried the king. Leela was delighted to see the king. She hopped down from the horse and greeted him.

"My lord, she desired to marry a king. I thought I better bring her to your presence," mumbled out the nervous general.

"Thank you, let her come with us. We will see what can be done about her desire," said the king. A palanquin and four bearers were brought from the village at hand. Leela sat in the palanquin and followed the king's party.

The king was on his way to inspect an old and dilapidated temple that he wanted to repair. He soon arrived at the deserted

temple and entered it. There was a large stone image in the temple but worship of the deity had stopped for a long time. After the king's servants cleaned the image, the king stood before it with folded hands for a while.

Leela now realised that though the general was greater than the captain and the king was greater than the general, the idol was greater than the king. She decided to follow the king no more, but to marry the deity and remain in the temple.

When the king prepared to leave for his palace, Leela said, "Kindly allow me to be here. I have decided to look upon the deity as my husband and lord!"

The king was moved by the maiden's words. He thought that she was a genuine devotee. He said, "If you feel like dedicating yourself to the deity, I have no right to claim you as my bride. Do as you wish. I will soon send a few maidservants to attend on you and enough provision for your comfortable living."

The place became deserted again after the king's party left. Leela was in the temple when a dog entered it. Since nobody visited the ruined temple, the dog had been accustomed to frequent it. As Leela looked on with surprise, the dog climbed to the head of the image and settled to a snug rest.

"This dog seems to be greater than the deity!" said Leela to herself and when, after an hour, the dog went out of the temple, she followed it.

The dog looked back at her once. She said, "I know how great you are. I should have married you only if you were a human being."

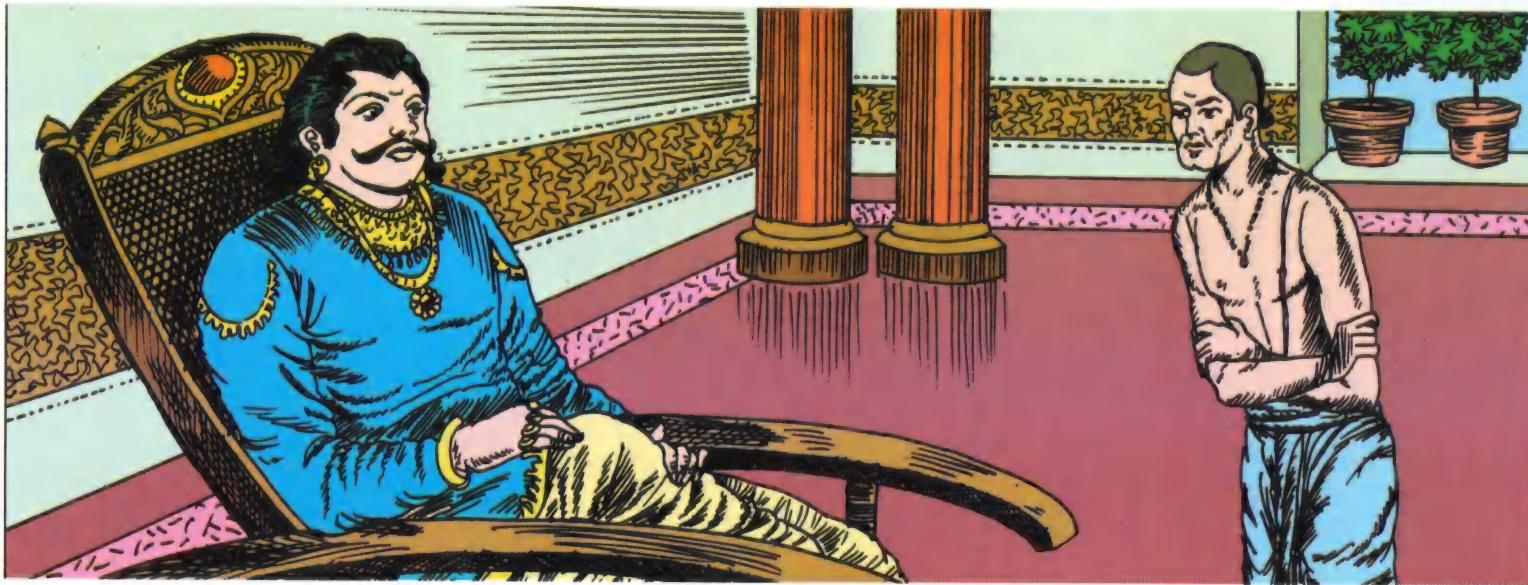
It was evening. The dog reached its master's house.

"Where had you gone away, you wretched creature?" shouted the young master and he planted a soft kick on his pet. The dog licked its master's feet.

"Here is a yet greater being," Leela told herself. She advanced at the young man and said, "Will you kindly accept me as your wife?"

The young man looked with amazement for a second and then said in a loving tone, "I have already given word to your father, haven't I, Leela? What doubt is there that I will be glad to marry you?"

Leela recognised the young man now. He was Ravi, the farmer. They were soon married—to the happiness of Leela's father, to the greater happiness of Ravi, and to the greatest happiness of Leela, for she had discovered that Ravi was greater than the king!



The Ascetic Landlord

At Bhavnagar lived a landlord who was as wealthy as he was stingy. He exploited people mercilessly and harassed them through litigations. He did not care for the abuses and epithets his victims heaped on him. However, he was afraid of one word—"sinner." He had heard that those who sinned were punished after death.

One day he asked a visiting sage, "Sir, what exactly is sin? How not to commit it?"

Said the sage, "There are sins and sins. For a man like you, to have much wealth and not to give a part of it in charity is a sin. If you are helping the needy and bringing succour to the poor, you are avoiding being a sinner!"

"I understand. Thank you."

An old Brahmin overheard the conversation. Hope flashed in his heart. Now that the landlord had understood the value of generosity, much can be expected of him. The Brahmin considered himself lucky that he would be the first man to take advantage of the landlord's change of heart.

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The landlord relaxed, his eyes half-shut, gold necklace and diamond rings dazzling on his luxuriously robed person. The Brahmin appeared before him.

"How can I help you?" asked the landlord.

"Huzoor, I'm in misery. Give me alms."

"Alms? Come tomorrow. We will see about it."

The Brahmin went away, all smiles, sure that the landlord will be ready with a handsome donation.

He appeared before the landlord the next day.

"How can I help you?"

"Huzoor, I came for alms ..."

"Alms? How can I give you anything since I have nothing? Don't you see that I have become an ascetic? I have nothing, so there is no question of my being a sinner for not giving anything in charity."

The Brahmin observed that the landlord had divested himself of his jewellery and changed his luxurious robe for ochre clothes.

"What did you do with all your property?" asked the surprised Brahmin.

"The property passed on to those who would have inherited them after my death—my sons!"

"In that case I must ask your sons for help," said the Brahmin. The landlord said nothing, but smiled.

The Brahmin met the landlord's sons and acquainted them with the situation.

"Brahmin, will you please tell us whether or not it is virtuous to be obedient to one's father?" asked the young men.

"Of course, it is virtuous to be obedient to one's father!"

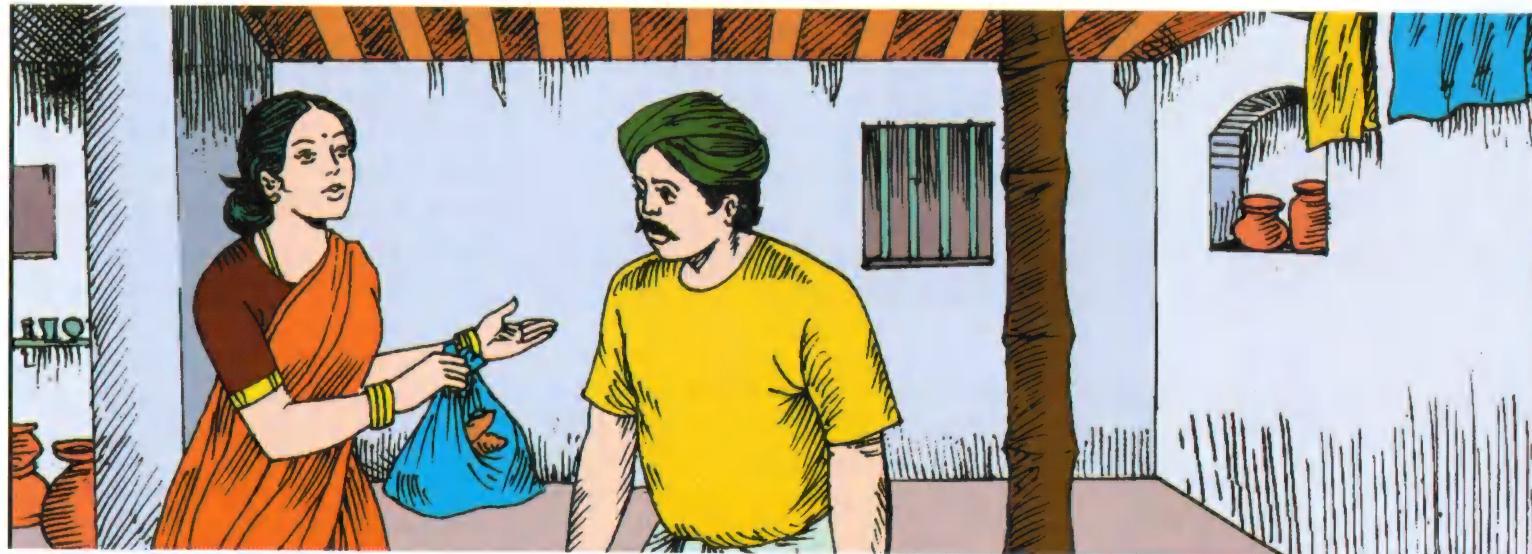
"Hope you will help us to remain virtuous. You see, our father made us take

the vow that we will not part with a single paisa in charity!"

The Brahmin sighed and went away.

BY THE WAY

Before the 60s, Chandamama used to be called a "Children's Monthly Magazine". Telugu Poet Laureate Vishwanatha Satyanarayanan, in a radio interview, suggested that Chandamama was popular even among adults and that calling it children's magazine was inappropriate. As a result, "Children's" was removed from the masthead.



A Costly Gift from the King

The king had been to the forest for hunting. He was thirsty. Close to the forest there was a hut. He knocked on the door. A poor woodcutter opened the door. Imagine his surprise when he saw the king standing before him. He stammered and managed to say, "Welcome, my lord!"

The woodcutter's wife spread a deerskin on the floor. The king sat

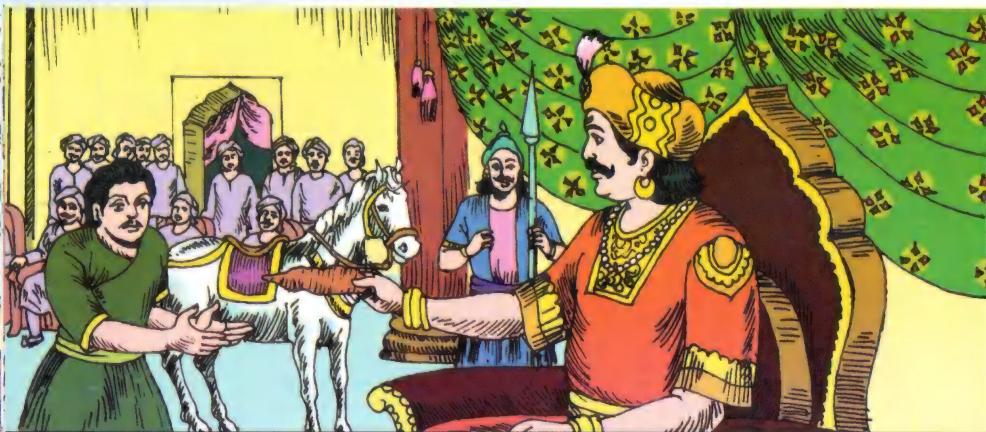
down and asked for water to drink. The woodcutter's wife brought water, but she also brought some boiled sweet potato. "My lord, you may have a bite or two of this, if you so please," she said with great affection. "This will be at least something different from the royal dishes!" she added.

The king enjoyed the sweet potato very much. He said, "Believe me, my sister,

this tastes wonderful. You must serve me this once again when I come here next."

The king took leave of the couple. A full year passed. But the king had no time to visit the forest again. One day, the woodcutter was setting out for the town on business. His wife gave him a parcel of boiled sweet potato and said, "Give this to the king. He had relished it, after all!"





The woodcutter was not sure if he would get admittance to the king's presence or if he should present such a poor gift to the king. He ate up most of the sweet potato sticks as he felt hungry on the way. Only the biggest one was left.

He loitered in front of the palace. "What do you want? What are you holding?" asked the guards.

"I want to see the king—to present him with a sweet potato—very carefully boiled," he said nervously.

"What! To present a sweet potato—very carefully boiled—to the king!" repeated the guards loudly, bursting into laughter.

Just then a landlord, who was notorious for his greed, was dismounting

from his horse. He heard the conversation. He too laughed and, going to the king, said, "My lord, do you know a joke? A rustic chap brings a sweet potato and claims that it is very carefully boiled for you!"

The landlord laughed and the courtiers joined him. "Must be a madcap!" commented someone.

But the king at once remembered the woodcutter. He asked a courtier to rush out and usher in the man. Thus the woodcutter found access to the king.

The king stood up and embraced him like a friend. He received the sweet potato with gratitude and kept it beside him. He asked his treasurer to fetch a thousand gold coins in a pouch. He gave the pouch to the woodcutter and told him, "This is for my sister and yourself. Now, take rest in our guesthouse. You must dine with me."

The woodcutter was led to the royal guesthouse. Suddenly an idea struck the landlord. He understood that the king was in a mood to give gifts. He went out and brought in his handsome horse and said, "My lord, this is a gift for you." The landlord was wondering how much the king would give him for such a precious present.

The king smiled and said, "Thank you. I accept the horse. And here is my gift to you." He handed over the sweet potato to him and said again, "You know very well how costly it is! I got it for a thousand gold coins! So, take half of it and leave the other half for me."

C

BY THE WAY

Stories from world mythology were introduced, as also the abridged versions of famous tales such as the Gulliver's Travels.

Buntu Survives Poison

Buntu was an orphan. He was very helpful to people in difficulty, but always played pranks with those who tried to take advantage of his goodness. While some people thought that he was quite clever, some others took him to be a fool.

Buntu worked with different households and earned just enough to maintain himself. He had only few needs and had no desire for any comfort.

Near his village lived a landlord named Rajul Shah. He owned an estate some five miles away. About a hundred families lived in his estate as his subjects and paid him tax. Rajul Shah visited his estate from time to time. It was customary for his subjects to entertain him with choice food whenever he went to the house of any one of them.

"Buntu, I want somebody to accompany me to my estate. My servants are busy. Will you go with me, holding the umbrella above my head?" Rajul Shah asked Buntu. "People consider it a blessing to be in my company," he added.

"I, too, would like to feel blessed, sir, but I'm hungry. Let me eat at your home and then I'll set out with you," said Buntu.

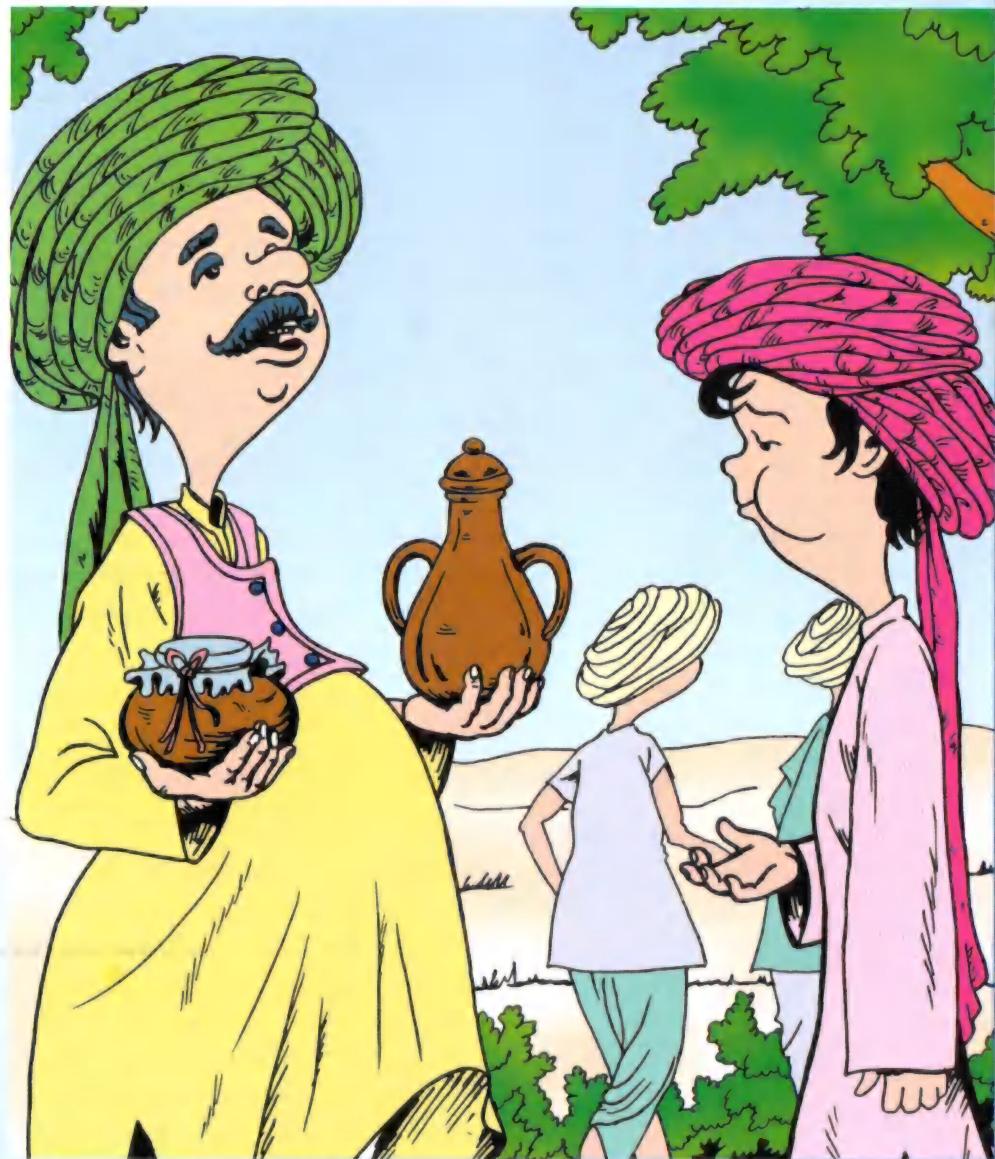
Rajul Shah laughed. "You'll get much better food once we reach our estate. Just tell your tummy to wait for an hour or so," he said.

Buntu did not murmur any more. He walked beside the landlord, holding an umbrella above his head.

At the estate, the landlord got busy deciding a dispute between two farmers over a piece of land. Since he did not go to anyone's house, nobody offered him any food. Hours passed. By the time the dispute was settled, it was noon. Poor Buntu was almost dying with hunger and thirst, but he had no other go than to wait under a banyan tree.

"I must hurry back home as I'm expecting an important guest," the landlord told his people.

"In that case, sir, please carry these with you, since you won't have any time





to eat or drink them here," said the two, farmers. One of them had brought roasted chicken and the other some fruit juice.

Just then a problem regarding another land was brought to his notice and one of the complainants invited him to lunch. The landlord was sure that the lunch would be sumptuous. So, he decided to stay on.

He had the roasted chicken packed in an earthen pot and covered with a piece of cloth. He then called Buntu and said: "My boy, take this home to my wife and tell her that I'll be late. Now, don't open it on the way, for there's a bird inside which will fly away the moment it gets a chance. And, don't open this mug either. It contains

deadly poison. The mere smell of it could kill you. Do you understand?"

"Oh yes," replied Buntu and started on his return journey.

The landlord ate his lunch, rested for a while, and then began walking back home. He had eaten good lunch, and he now dreamed of a sumptuous dinner consisting of the chicken and the delicious fruit juice awaiting him at home.

Midway there was a lake. The landlord saw someone lying asleep under a tree, enjoying the cool breeze.

But the fellow looked familiar, didn't he? The landlord went closer. The fellow asleep was none other than Buntu. Beside him lay the earthern pot and the mug — both empty.

The landlord shook him awake. Buntu sat up and looked absolutely surprised.

"What's the matter with you?" asked the angry landlord.

"Matter with me, sir? Am I still alive?"

"What do you mean?" demanded the landlord.

"Sir, a sudden gust of wind tore away the cover of the pot and, as you had rightly

feared, the bird flew away at once. I was heart-broken. How to show my face to you? I decided to end my life. So I drank the poison the mug contained and lay down, sure to die in a moment. But now I realise what a blessing it was to be in your company. I survived the deadly poison!" Buntu bowed to a speechless Rajul Shah.

BY THE WAY

A National Readership Survey in 1985 showed that Chandamama, a book targeted at under-16, attracted 94-lakh adult readers. At that time, the number of copies printed was roughly 9 lakhs.



Mystery of a Title

In a village somewhere lived two thieves. One was called Crook and the other was called Major Crook. Crook was a big-built man and a very good wrestler. He could jump on anybody and make him cry for mercy. Major Crook, on the other hand, was a puny, thin man. Now Crook was quite envious of the other's title.

'Why should he be called Major Crook?' he often wondered to himself. 'What does he have that I do not?' Still there was nothing he could do about it. Everybody called him Crook and the other Major Crook. Titles of this kind are a matter of public opinion, after all!

One day, Major Crook got the news that a rich trader in a village some two days' journey away had struck a good deal and had kept the money at home. He set off for that village to rob the man.

Crook met him on his way back. Looking at his bulging pockets, Crook guessed that Major Crook had successfully carried out his raid. He decided to relieve

him of his loot, so he accompanied him. They travelled together on the road politely speaking of this and that. At nightfall they found a room in a roadside hostelry and spread out their blankets to sleep.

Major Crook was soon snoring. Crook thought this was his chance and searched Major Crook's bed and clothes for the money he was sure he had, but he could not find it anywhere. Not even a single coin did he find!

The next morning, Major Crook soon got ready to leave, and Crook saw that his pockets were bulging once again. He wondered where Major Crook had hidden the money the previous night, but just could not think of a place he had left out in his search. Anyway, they continued on their journey together.

Once again they had to spend the night at a hostelry and like on the previous night, Major Crook went to sleep first. This time, too, Crook searched Major Crook's bed and clothes carefully. He even ran his

hand over the rafters and the windowsill, but his search was fruitless. The next day when they were ready to leave, he saw that Major Crook had bulging pockets once again.

Soon talking of this and that, they reached the village and Major Crook's two huge friends met him at the village entrance. As they were parting, Crook asked Major Crook: "These last two nights I spent a lot of time looking for the money I'm sure you have got. Where did you hide it?"

"Ah!" said Major Crook. "I hid it under your pillow, for I was sure you would not look there."

Crook then realised why the other was called Major Crook by everybody.

PUBLISHED
IN 2001





The Fight

PUBLISHED
IN 2002

Ranji had been less than a month in the small foothills town when he discovered the pool in the forest. It was the height of summer, and the school he had newly joined was yet to reopen. He was still without friends and wandered about a good deal by himself into the hills and forests that stretched away on all sides of the town. He had grown up in the mountains and was unused to these hot and steamy lower altitudes.

It was hot, very hot, at that time of the year and Ranji, thirteen, walked about in his singlet and shorts, his brown feet white with the chalky dust that flew up from the ground. The earth was parched, and the grass brown; the trees listless, hardly stirring, waiting for a cool wind or a refreshing shower of rain. It was on one of those trying days that Ranji found the pool in the forest. The water had a gentle, green translucency, and he could see the smooth, round pebbles at the bottom of the pool. It was fed by a small stream that emerged from a cluster of rocks.

During the monsoon, this stream would be a rushing torrent, cascading down from the hills; but in midsummer, it was barely a trickle. The rocks, however, held the water in the pool, and it did not dry up unlike the pools in the plains.

When Ranji found the pool, he did not hesitate to get into the water. He had often been swimming, on his own or with friends, in the river that ran past his mountain village. There the current had been strong, and one had to be a good swimmer to avoid being swept away. This pool was different—cool and inviting. He threw off his clothes and leapt into the water. He was slim and supple, and he glistened like a golden underwater creature in patches of sunlit water.

He came again the next day, and he was there for almost an hour, sliding in and out of the limpid, green water, or lying stretched out on the smooth, yellow rock, in the shade of the broadleaved forest trees.

It was while he rested on the rock that he noticed another boy standing a little distance away, staring at him in a hostile manner. The boy looked a year or two older than Ranji; he was taller and heavier. He had only just noticed Ranji and he stood at the edge of the pool, in his bathing shorts, as though waiting for an explanation of Ranji's presence. Finally, he called out, "What are you doing here, you bag of bones?"

"Swimming," replied Ranji, cheerfully. "Why don't you join me?"

"I like to swim alone," said the other. "This is my pool. I did not invite you here. And why aren't you wearing any clothes?"

"I don't wear clothes when I am swimming."

"You skinny son of a lizard, put on your clothes!"

"Son of a buffalo, take yours off!"

That was too much for the bigger boy. He strode up to Ranji, who still sat on the rock. Planting his broad feet firmly on the sand, he said (as though it would settle the matter once and for all): "Don't you know I am a Punjabi? I don't take insults from village boys!"

"So, you like to fight with village boys?" said Ranji. "Well, in my village we learn to fight while still in our cradles. We're Rajputs!"

"I'm a Punjabi!"

"I'm a Rajput!"

They had reached an impasse. One said he was a Punjabi, the other had proclaimed himself a Rajput. There was little more that could be said.

"You understand that I'm a Punjabi?" repeated the stranger, uneasily aware that the other had not seemed sufficiently impressed.

"I've heard you say it three times," replied Ranji.

"Then why don't you run off?"

"I'm waiting for you to run."

"I shall have to thrash you," said the Punjabi boy, assuming a threatening stance.

"Well, let's see how you do it," said Ranji.

They stared each other in the eye for almost a minute. Then the Punjabi boy struck Ranji in the face. Ranji staggered back, feeling giddy.

"There you are!" exclaimed his assailant. "Will you be off now?"

By way of reply, Ranji swung his arm up and pushed a hard, bony fist against his opponent's nose.

And then they were at each other's throats, swaying together on the rock, tumbling onto the sand, rolling over and over, arms and legs locked in a fierce struggle. In this way they rolled right into the shallows of the pool.

Spluttering and covered with mud, they groped for each other's heads and throats. But after five minutes of frenzied, unscientific struggle, neither boy had emerged victorious. Panting with exhaustion, they stood back from each other, making great efforts to crown victory with a suitable speech.

"Now do you realise that I'm a Punjabi?" gasped the bigger boy.

"Do you now know that I'm a Rajput?" said Ranji, with difficulty.

They gave a moment's consideration to each other's declarations. Then the Punjabi boy said, "So, you won't go away?"

"I'm not going anywhere," said Ranji.





"Then we shall have to continue the fight."

"That's right."

But neither boy moved or took the initiative.

Then the Punjabi boy had an inspiration.

"We'll continue the fight tomorrow," he said. "If you dare to return tomorrow, I'll give you a real thrashing. I was not at my best today."

"You'll be worse tomorrow," said Ranji. "I'll be here all right."

They turned their back on each other, and returning to their respective rocks, dressed and then left the forest by different routes.

When Ranji got home, he found it difficult to account for the cuts and bruises that showed on his face, arms, and legs. It was obvious that he had been in a fight, and his mother insisted that he stay at home for the rest of the day.

That evening, though, he slipped out of the house, went to the bazaar, and spent the last of his pocket money on a couple of hot, sweet jalebis. He had just finished

eating when he saw his recent adversary coming down the road. He stood his ground and scowled at his opponent. The other boy said nothing either, but scowled back with equal ferocity.

The next day was as hot as the previous one. Ranji felt weak and lazy and not at all eager for a fight. His body was stiff and sore after the previous encounter; but he could not refuse the challenge. He must face up to his enemy, outwit him if possible. To surrender would be to forfeit all rights to the pool in the forest, and he had no intention of giving it up.

When he reached the pool, he found the other boy sitting at the far end, showing off by heaving large rocks into the water. When he saw Ranji, he shouted, "Come over on this side and fight!"

But Ranji had decided to make his own conditions.

"Come this side and fight," he shouted back.

"Swim over and fight me here!" called the other. "It seems you cannot swim the length of this pool!"

Ranji could have swum the length of the pool a dozen times. Removing his outer

garments, he dived straight into the water, cutting through it like a long, golden fish, and surfacing with hardly a splash. The other boy's jaw hung loose in amazement.

"You can dive!" he exclaimed.

"Oh, that's easy," said Ranji, treading water and waiting for another challenge. "Can't you dive?"

"No," said the other. "I jump straight in. But if you will show me how, I'll make a dive."

"It's easy," said Ranji. "Stand straight on the rock, hold your arms out and allow your head to displace your feet!"

The heavier boy stood up, stiff and straight, stretched out his arms, and threw himself at the water. He landed flat on his belly with a crash that sent the birds screaming out of the trees.

Ranji burst into a laughter.

"Are you trying to empty the pool!" he called, as the other came to the surface, spouting water like a small whale.

"Wasn't it good?" asked the boy, evidently proud of his feat.

"Not very good," said Ranji. "You should have more practice. See, I'll do it again."

And pulling himself up on a rock, Ranji executed another perfect dive. The other boy waited for him to come up; but, swimming under water, in a world of soft lights and crooked sunshine, Ranji circled the pool and came up from behind his opponent.

"How did you do that?" asked the boy.

"Can't you swim under water?" asked Ranji.

"I don't know. Let's see ..."

He made a tremendous effort to plunge to the bottom of the pool; indeed, he thought he had gone right down, though his bottom, like a duck's, remained above the surface.

Ranji, however, did not want to sound too discouraging. He really wanted to help.

"Not bad," he said. "But you need a lot of practice."

"Will you teach me?" asked his foe.

"If I have the time, I might teach you," said Ranji.

"You'd better teach me or I'll thrash you," said the other aggressively, but then changed to a more humble tone. "Will you come here every day and teach me?"

"I'll try," said Ranji. They had pulled themselves out of the water and were sitting side by side on a smooth rock.

"My name is Vijay," said the bigger boy. "What's yours?"

"Ranji."

"I'm strong, am I not?" said Vijay, bending his arm so that a ball of muscle stood up.

"You're quite strong," admitted Ranji. "You should become a wrestler."

"I'll become Mister Universe," said Vijay, thumping his chest. He looked critically at Ranji's thin but hard body.

"You're quite strong yourself," he conceded. "You're too bony. You hill people don't eat enough. You must come and have a meal with me one day. I drink one litre of milk every day. We have our own cow! Teach me to swim and I'll give you milk with almonds."

"Agreed," said Ranji.

Vijay put his arm around Ranji and said, "We're friends now, yes?"

"We're friends," said Ranji.

The birds had settled again in the branches of the forest trees, and the pool



was still and limpid in the afternoon shadows.

"It's our pool," declared Vijay. "Nobody else will come here. Who would dare?"

"Yes, who would dare?" said Ranji, smiling in the knowledge that victory was really his.





A Game of Chess

PUBLISHED
IN 2003

Long, long ago, there lived a king who loved to play chess. We don't know much about him, but for the sake of the story, let's just call him Chatur Ranga of Shatranjpur. He was a brilliant player and no one could beat him at his favourite game.

Of course, everyone in the kingdom wanted to play chess with the king. Imagine how grand you would feel if you could tell people that you are just coming away after playing chess with the king. That's how everyone in the kingdom wanted to show off! But Chatur Ranga found it irritating to play chess with rank beginners who didn't know a bishop from a knight!

One fine day, an ignorant player maddened him by wrongly addressing the queen and king pieces as pawns. The furious king then declared that any player who lost to him at chess would be beheaded.

Now, of course, no one wanted to lose his head just for the sake of playing chess with the king. So, they stopped pretending

to be chess players and Chatur Ranga finally heaved a sigh of peace!

Many months passed. Then one day, a young girl from a neighbouring kingdom came to his palace. She challenged the king to a game. She looked bright and smart, so he felt sorry for her.

"Listen, dear girl!" said he. "Do you know anything at all about chess? I mean being a girl, you might prefer playing with dolls."

"King Chatur Ranga, sir!" said the girl, whose name was Preethi, very patiently. "Which century are you living in? This is the fifteenth century and we girls have come a long way. Of course, I know chess, and I've outgrown dolls! I also know wrestling and archery, for your information!"

The king smiled doubtfully. "If you say so," he said, nodding. "But it is my duty to warn you. If you lose the game, you lose your pretty head, too! So think again before you challenge me."

Preethi continued to smile. "Yes, your majesty, I know that. Maybe I will lose the game and my head. On the other hand, I may win. Then, what's to happen?"

"Impossible!" snorted the king. "No one has beaten me for years. But if by some luck you do manage to win, you can have anything you wish."

"Thank you, your majesty," said Preethi, "but all I want would be some corn. And let it be measured by a chessboard. That is to say for the first square on the board, I get one ear of corn, for the second I get double that, and for the third, double the corn in the second and so on, until all the sixty-four squares of the board are accounted for."

Chatur Ranga was very amused. "You could have asked for gold, jewels or even a part of my kingdom. Instead you ask for corn – just like a woman!"

Preethi merely shrugged her shoulders. "Your majesty, excuse me for saying this: you

don't know women! You will see that my victory here will be a double win!"

"Well, we shall see," laughed the king. And he ordered one of his ministers to fetch the chess set, and sent another to tell the executioner to have the sword sharpened.

The game started well for Chatur Ranga. His bishop gobbled up several pawns of the girl. And then her black knight fell, and then her two bishops. But Preethi still looked quite unconcerned, and you would never think that her head was at stake!

Then the king, feeling quite over-confident, made one wrong move. Preethi grabbed the chance with both her hands and the next time the king looked at the board, he was horrified to see that he was 'checkmated!' He had lost the game.

"Well, well!" said Chatur Ranga, clearing his throat. "You were right and I was wrong. Girls are pretty smart these days. And you play chess quite well!"

Then he asked her. "Before we began the game, you said something about a double win. What did you mean by that?"

"I'll explain that after I receive my prize of the corn," replied Preethi. The king was still curious, but he ordered that

the corn be measured as she had asked for. The Chief Minister hurried away to do so, but after an hour, he returned looking very dazed and bewildered.

"Your majesty," he stammered, "the store keepers tell me that if you take one ear of corn and double it sixty-four times according to the number of squares on a chess board, the total number of corn cobs comes to a figure well over eighteen million, million, million!"

"What's more," said the shaken minister, "the store keepers tell me that if we employ a hundred men to work day and night, it would take many years to count such a huge number. But that does not really matter because we do not have so many ears of corn in the kingdom. Nor can we grow so much in a lifetime!"

The king was dumbfounded. When he recovered his composure, he told Preethi, "Well, you have certainly had a double win! You won the game, and then I cannot pay you the reward I promised. But you have taught me a lesson: a game is a game and cannot have serious conditions attached to it. In future, there will be no more beheadings. I'll play chess for the enjoyment of the game. And never will I underestimate the intelligence of women!"

King Chatur Ranga rewarded Preethi with expensive books, precious manuscripts, gorgeous jewellery and silks before she left for her country. And from then on, the palace gates were kept open for all aspiring chess players, even those who did not know a bishop from a knight.

But King Chatur Ranga now treated them with more sympathy. He appointed a smart young man as his official Chess Representative and only those who could defeat him at chess were allowed to play with the king!



BY THE WAY

Chandamama was the first children's magazine to be printed in four colours from 1983.



Flies away to Fortune

PUBLISHED
IN 2005

“

h! These flies!” Mulla Nasruddin cursed when flies made him the ideal landing site putting an end to his hopes of an enjoyable afternoon nap. He got hold of a towel and waved it in all directions. The flies kept away so long as he continued to flail his arms. But how long can one do that? The arms began to ache at the joints. The moment he rested his arms, the flies returned. One of them landed on his upper lip and boldly tickled the tip of his nose, forcing a series of sneezes. Another fly buzzed around his ears; and a third one tried to walk right into his eye. They were here, there and everywhere. He did not know how to get rid of the flies.

Then his eyes fell on his donkey. It was swinging its tail, now to the right, then to the left. He walked across to the donkey, muttering to himself, ‘Nobody gets a tail for

the asking. One has to be born with it. O! Donkey! I feel jealous of you!’

He untied the rope, sat on the donkey’s back and made a few sounds, gently poking its ribs with the stick. The donkey moved slowly at first and faster when Nasruddin waved the stick in the air. Soon the flies were left behind. That made the Mulla happy. He placed his hand on the donkey’s back and said, “You don’t have to run, any more. Just relax. The flies are not chasing us.”

Dusk was falling fast when he returned. His wife was at the door, crying her heart out. Her face looked pale. Her eyes were red. It was clear that she was in deep agony.

Nasruddin quickly got off the donkey, ran to her, gently picked up her arm, lifted her chin with his index finger and asked, “What’s the matter, dear?”

That was enough to make her burst into loud wails. "Where did you vanish? When you were away, an official from the Caliph's Court came with four men. They had brought spades and trowels along. The official said there was a hidden treasure buried under the floor of our bedroom, and the Caliph had the right to take away hidden treasures. I asked him to wait till you returned. But he was in a hurry. He ordered his men to get to work. They pushed me aside, threw the cots and the quilts and the pillows and the bedcovers out and dug up the floor. Where the floor once was, you'll now find a four feet deep pit."

The sight that greeted him made him wince. He slumped on the edge of the pit, buried his face in his arms and sat like one in a daze for long. "Did they find any treasure?" he asked, at last, turning to his wife who was still in tears.

"No," she sobbed.

"You should have asked them to fill up the pit and re-lay the floor," he added.

"Would you have told the official from the Caliph's Court to relay the floor?" she challenged him.

He had no answer. He knew none would have the courage to demand anything as a matter of right from the Caliph. That made Nasruddin fret and fume. "Is it just that the Caliph's men dig up the floor of the bedroom and not repair it?" he asked himself, several times. "No, the Caliph has no right to do that. He must pay for this crime. He must. How can I get even with the Caliph?"

Mulla Nasruddin tossed around, all night, lying on a mat hurriedly set on the floor of the kitchen by his wife, after pushing the pots and pans out of the way. He must have dropped off to sleep much after midnight. He might have slept longer but for the flies. As soon as day broke, a fly chose his face for a morning walk. Another fly practised dancing on his eyelids.

"Flies! Yesterday the Caliph did me in. Today the flies deny me the right to sleep for as long as I like," he bounced out of bed and groggily walked to the back of the house to brush his teeth and wash his face and hands and legs.

He returned to the kitchen a little later. His wife handed him a mug of hot *khawa* and said, with a smile, "Cheer

up, dear. What cannot be cured must be endured. Let us fill the pit and level the floor. When we have money, we shall add a layer of tiles," she snuggled close to him.

"You look pretty, dear," he took a sip of the drink.

A fly settled on the rim of the mug.

"Flies everywhere!" he quickly drank the *khawa*.

Did the drink work wonders? Nasruddin's eyes sparkled suddenly. He asked his wife whether she had anything left of last night's dinner. She nodded her head.

"Fetch it," he said.

She did not ask him why he wanted it. She knew her man and his mood. When he got bright ideas, he expected her not to ask silly questions. She quickly got the dish, held in an earthen pot. He noticed a few flies, romping on the top layer of the dish. He smiled to himself, covered the vessel with a piece of cloth and walked off, telling his wife, "I'll be back soon. I want to show this to the Caliph, tell him how flies are making my life miserable and ask him for the authority to swat flies."





She knew that nobody needed the Caliph's permission to swat flies. That alerted her. She sensed that he had a brainwave. What it was, she didn't know. But she was sure that he would not fail.

He reached the Caliph's Court, paid homage to the Caliph, placed the pot he had brought along in front of the Caliph and whipped off the cloth. A few flies took to flight. "O Noble Sire, these flies are making my life miserable. Give me permission to swat them wherever I find them," he begged.

The Caliph thought it funny. Nobody had ever come to him with such a request.

"Everyone is doing that," the Caliph said.

"Maybe, but I won' like to raise my hand against the flies. They, too, are the subjects of the Great Caliph," Nasruddin argued.

"The flies! My subjects! Ha, ha! Ho, ho!" the Caliph burst into laughter.

"Can I swat the flies, O Noble Sire?"

"You can."

"Would you put it in writing, O Noble Sire!" Nasruddin asked.

The Caliph prepared a scroll and signed it. The royal seal was affixed to it.

"O Noble Sire! How can I thank you!" Nasruddin bowed, tucked the scroll in the folds of his dress, picked up the pot he had brought along and moved off.

He armed himself with a flyswatter and roamed around the town. He brought the swatter down on the flies, wherever they happened to be. He brought it down on the cheek of an official of the Caliph's Court. He made it land with vicious force on the back of a merchant who was very avaricious and sold adulterated goods. The swatter came down heavily on every spot where Nasruddin found a fly, be it on pots and pans or cheeks and noses and chins and backs of people.

When people protested, he showed them the royal scroll.

The news of the swatting spree reached the Caliph, too. The Caliph had a hearty laugh.

A few days later, the Caliph held a meeting of the wise men in the land. Mulla Nasruddin, too, was invited. He came to the court, holding the swatter.

The royal scroll lay in the folds of his dress. He bowed, paid homage to the Caliph and sat next to the Caliph.

The Caliph began his address. Suddenly something hit him on the back.

Who could dare hit him? He turned and found Nasruddin getting ready to deliver yet another blow.

A dozen men pounced on Nasruddin.

"O Noble Sire, why am I being treated like this? I was swatting a fly that alighted on your back. You've authorized me to swat flies wherever they be," Nasruddin spoke softly but clearly.

"Free him!" the caliph told the men.

"Thank you, O Noble Sire," Nasruddin replied, politely. "Sit as far as you can from me. And," the Caliph added, "you'll see me after the meeting is over."

They met.

"Enough is enough, my man. The game has gone on for long. You can't hit people on the pretext of swatting flies. It has to end. Surrender the scroll. In return, ask for any compensation you want," the Caliph told him.

"How about ten thousand shekels, O Noble Sire!

"Ten thousand shekels?" the Caliph thought he was asking too high a price.

"Yes, Noble Sire! Part of the money I will use to relay the floor of the bedroom that was dug up under your orders. And the rest will fund my pilgrimage to Mecca," said Nasruddin with a straight face.

"Clever, Nasruddin. I now see what you were really after. I thought I would find a fortune when I ordered my men to dig out your bedroom. Now I find that you have landed a fortune of ten thousand shekels."

The Caliph ordered the court official to pay Nasruddin the amount.



BY THE WAY

The first international edition of Chandamama was the Sinhala edition (1978–81). The then President Jayawardane released the issue.

PUBLISHED
IN 2006

When the Child Cries



Emperor Akbar had a large number of courtiers. Most of them had honey in their tongues. They vied with each other to win the Emperor's favour. They never missed an opportunity to please the Emperor. They never differed with him, but agreed with him even when he said something absurd or silly.

That attitude amused Birbal. He thought the courtiers were more servile than even pet dogs.

He did not keep his opinion to himself. He made it public.

Many courtiers felt angry.

"Withdraw that charge," they said.

"Why should I?" he growled.

"We are not dogs," they groaned.

"I know, I know," Birbal sounded quite amused.

"Yet you compare us with pet dogs?" they raised their eyebrows.

"I'm sorry. I failed to notice one difference," Birbal chuckled to himself while adding, "the dog has a tail where one ought to find it. You have the tail where the tongue ought to be. So you wag your tongue when the Emperor is around. You nod your heads even when his ideas and statements are wrong. You've no courage to differ with him. You're cowards," Birbal sneered.

"Withdraw those words," the courtiers raised their fists, threateningly.

"Well, you've all that men should have," he paused, "... except ..."

"Except?" the courtiers asked in one voice.

"Except spines," Birbal gloated in glee.

"You're insulting us," said a courtier.

"This has gone on for too long," said another.

"It's time you stopped abusing us," said a third.

"My friends, truth hurts," said Birbal.

"Truth? What truth?" the courtiers made threatening gestures.

"The truth that you're no better than pet dogs. You're slaves; you can never dare do anything against the wishes of the Emperor," Birbal did not show any sign of fear.

"If you're so sure of yourself, prove that you can be bolder than us," one of the courtiers locked glances with Birbal.

"I'm willing," Birbal nodded his head. "If you fail, will you publicly confess that you had been wrong?" they added.

"Suits me," Birbal smiled at them.

One of the courtiers remembered a rule strictly observed at the Royal Court. They always reached the Royal Court before the Emperor arrived; and stayed on so long as the Emperor was around. They never absented themselves from the Royal Court without prior permission.

"Birbal, will you dare stay away from the Royal Court tomorrow without seeking prior permission?" he asked.

Birbal thought for a moment. He knew the risk. The Emperor would certainly take offence. Why, he might be arrested and detained in the dungeon. In his fury, the Emperor might even sentence him to death.

'But nothing dared, nothing achieved,' Birbal muttered to himself.

"Why are you silent? You're now scared!" the courtiers teased him.

"Scared? Not a wee little bit. On the contrary, I'm feeling sorry for you. Sorry that you will have no face to show, once I prove you're all cowards," Birbal kept talking while thinking of ways and means to escape the wrath of the Emperor while he kept away from the Royal Court the next day.

He talked and talked while he thought and thought till at last he knew what to do. He held his head up and said, "All right, tomorrow I won't be at the Court when the Emperor arrives. I would stay out without prior permission."

"And get it on your neck," a courtier sniped.

"I'm not like you. I have a spine that backs my neck," Birbal silenced them with that sharp snipe, gave them a defiant nod and stomped out. They watched him till he vanished from sight.

"The fool! He's in for real trouble," the courtiers melted away, happy that they would soon see the end of Birbal's influence at the Royal Court.

Next day, the courtiers arrived, as usual, long before the Emperor arrived. They awaited his arrival. They wondered whether Birbal would have the courage to stay away.

Some of them expected him to turn up, just in time to greet the Emperor. But Birbal did not come.

The soldier carrying the royal insignia walked in, hailing the Emperor and announcing, "*Shahenshah padhaar rahan hai!*"

Everyone at the Court stood up. They bowed low while the Emperor walked along the carpeted aisle between the seats meant for the courtiers, climbed the steps and took his seat on the throne. He surveyed the Court. All the courtiers were present. Not Birbal.



"Where's Birbal?" he asked. "Has he sent word that he won't be coming?"

"No, *Shahenshah*. None that I know of," the official of the Court stood up, bowed and announced.

"How dare he absent himself without intimation? Send someone to his house. Tell him that he should appear before me right away!" the Emperor roared.

"Yes, *Shahenshah*." The official instructed one of the guards to fetch Birbal.

The guard left immediately. He returned an hour later, alone.





"Where's Birbal?" the Emperor asked.

"He said he would come as soon as his baby girl stops crying," the guard announced.

"How dare he disobey my orders? What sort of a nincompoop is he that he can't make a child stop crying? I thought him to be wise, that he had an answer to every problem," the Emperor turned red with rage.

The courtiers felt the heat and chose to be silent.

"Go, bring Birbal right away. If he doesn't come willingly, bind him and drag him to my presence," the Emperor exploded.

Sometime later, Birbal presented himself at the Court. He bowed to the Emperor and waited.

"Birbal," the Emperor surveyed him, from head to foot, his eyes red with rage.

"Shahenshah, I beg your pardon. My little girl was crying and crying since morning. I was trying to make her stop crying. That's how I got delayed. I beg your pardon, Shahenshah! I erred by not turning up at Court in time. But I could not. The child won't let me leave. I'm afraid she is still howling, bringing the house down," Birbal explained why he was late.

"I thought making a child stop crying should be child's play for you, Birbal," the Emperor glared at him.

The courtiers smiled at each other. They hoped that Birbal would not get away easily, that the Emperor would punish him severely for breaking the rule.

"Alampana," Birbal lowered his voice and added, "once I explain the situation, you'll see my point."

"Go ahead," the Emperor showed curiosity.

"The girl demanded sugarcane. I got a stub of sugarcane, cut it into small bits and offered the pieces to her. She kept on crying, saying between sobs that she wanted sugarcane juice. So I extracted the juice, collected it in a glass and held the glass out to her. She wildly pushed the glass aside and cried still more loudly, asking me to put the juice back into the sugarcane," Birbal paused before adding, "Shahenshah! I could not do that. My baby is still crying. Crying her heart out."

"Birbal! How can you be my counsel when you can't handle a little baby's problem?" the Emperor's moustache twitched.

"Alampana! Have you ever tried to make a crying baby smile?" Birbal asked.

"No."

"I think you should try that. May I make a suggestion, Shahenshah? ..." Birbal hesitated.

"Speak out your mind, you silly man, who couldn't make a three year old stop crying!" the Emperor's words sounded truly harsh.

"Shahenshah! I shall play the part of a three-year-old child, crying endlessly. You enact the role of an elder who tries to stop me crying," Birbal spelt out his plan.

"I'll make you smile in seconds," the Emperor sounded sure of himself.

"Do that, Shahenshah," Birbal fell on the ground and started crying loudly. He played the part of the child with skill. The Emperor walked down the steps and came close to Birbal.

He said, in a soothing voice, "Stop crying, baby. What do you want?"

"Get me a gold ring," said Birbal, in a child's voice which he was good at producing.

The Emperor took a ring off one of his fingers and gave it to Birbal. Still Birbal continued to cry.

"Stop crying. Didn't I give you the ring?" said the Emperor.

"Get me an elephant," Birbal made yet another demand while crying loudly.

Someone hurried to bring a baby elephant.

"There! An elephant for you!" the Emperor told Birbal.

Birbal kept on crying loudly, beating the ground with his hands and feet.

"Stop crying. Or else...?" the Emperor screamed.

Birbal cried still more loudly.

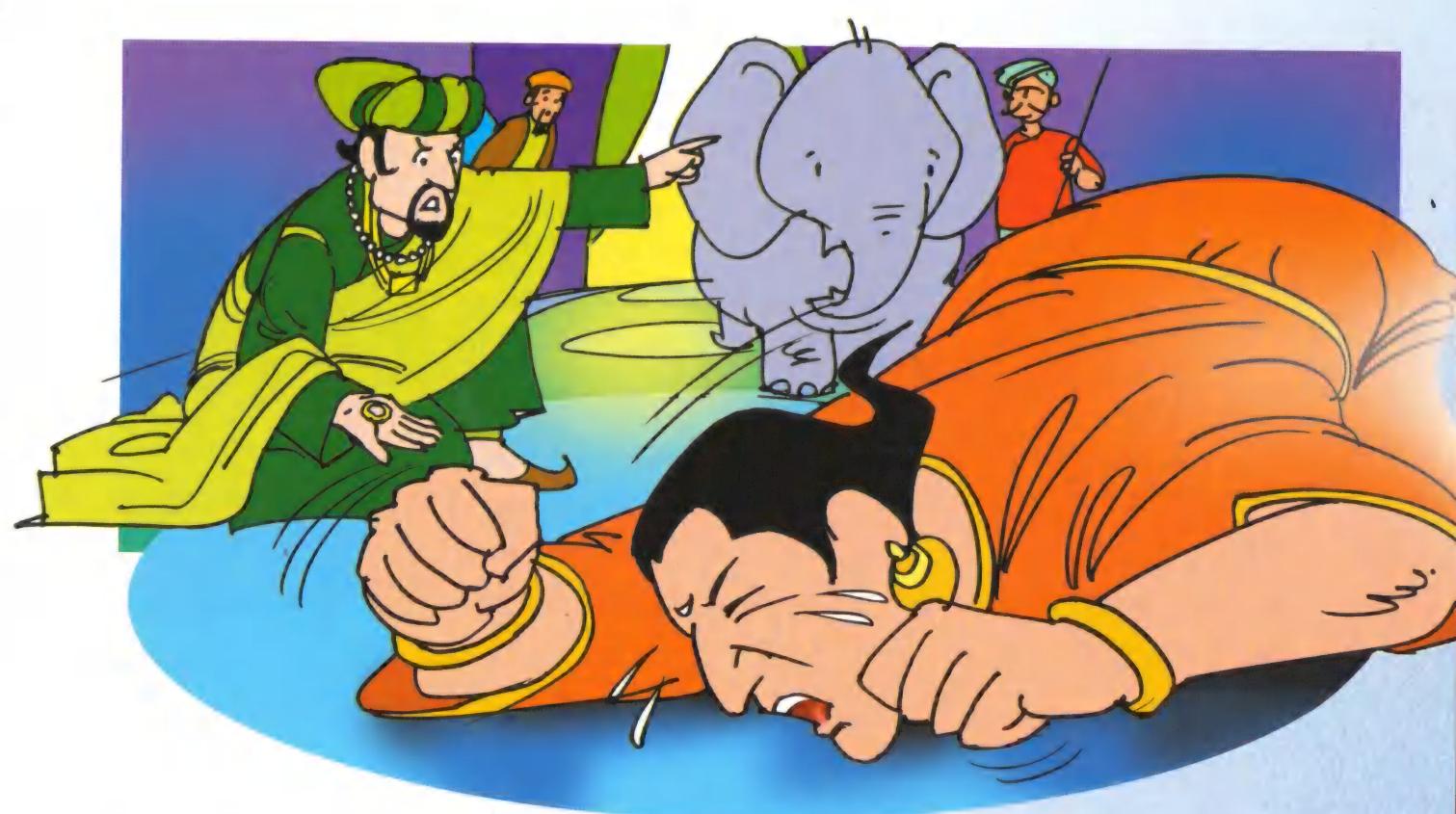
"What do you want now?" the Emperor wrung his hands, helplessly.

"Make the elephant go through the ring," Birbal said between sobs.

"Impossible!" the Emperor admitted.

"As impossible as getting the juice back into the sugarcane," said Birbal as he stood up, laughing.

The Emperor tried to look stern, but could not. Tickled by the humour in the situation, he burst into laughter. So did the courtiers who always took the cue from the Emperor.



"Birbal, O Birbal! We now understand why you were late. A child can be very demanding," the Emperor walked back to the throne, amidst cheers.

Birbal smiled at the courtiers. Most of them avoided his eyes. They felt ashamed of themselves. They had failed to get Birbal into trouble this time too.



Gold Aplenty

In the city of Malyapur lived Ramdas, an honest man. He was happily married and had two sons.

When, to his great dismay, his wife died of a sudden illness, Ramdas was faced with a problem. Who would look after the little boys? He decided to leave them with their maternal uncle who was living in a faraway village.



Before he set out with the boys, Ramdas took his wife's precious ornaments and all his money to his rich neighbour, Shaitansingh. "Brother, this is all I have for my sons' use in future. Please keep it safe," he told his neighbour.

"Don't worry," Shaitansingh assured him, "your property will be as safe with me as the sun in the sky."

But Shaitansingh was as greedy as he was rich. When Ramdas returned to Malyapur after a few months and asked for the ornaments and money, Shaitansingh handed over to him a box of fake ornaments and counterfeit coins. Ramdas soon found out how terribly he had been cheated. He went back to his sons, told them of Shaitansingh's treachery, and soon died a heart-broken man.

Years passed. The sons of Ramdas grew up as two bright young men. They took to trading in gold and soon grew rich. But they never forgot Shaitansingh's wickedness. One day, they set out for their native town, Malyapur.

The elder brother had now grown long hair and a beard. Donning the dress of a mendicant, he went over to a deserted temple next to the river that flowed by Malyapur.

The younger brother dressed himself up as a prince. With a retinue of servants, he went to live in a rented house opposite Shaitansingh's mansion.

The 'prince' lived luxuriously and gave alms generously. Before long he attracted Shaitansingh's attention.

'This young man is spending money as sportively as a farmer scatters seeds on his field. He hands a beggar a rupee when a single paisa would have been enough. Every evening musicians sing before him for handsome rewards. What a pity money that ought to be locked up in iron chests is being thrown away at beggars and singers!' thought Shaitansingh.

He called on the prince and began to flatter him. The prince showed much respect for him. They became friends.

"Thief, thief!" the prince shouted one night. The neighbours came running to his house. The young man told them that some burglars had entered his bedroom. They were about to take away his caskets – full of gold – when he woke up and raised the cry. The burglars escaped.

Shaitansingh did not allow this opportunity to slip by. He waited until all the other neighbours had left, and then said: "Prince, it is not wise for you to live in this unsafe house. I'm your friend and my house is like a castle. Why don't you come and live with me as my honoured guest? Your wealth will be safe in my house."

The prince thanked him and accepted the proposal. A dozen caskets,

supposedly laden with gold, were carried to Shaitansingh's house. The prince was shown into a big room. He heaved a sigh of relief to see his valuable caskets lined up near his bed.

Shaitansingh's joy was tremendous at the sight of his guest's wealth. It only heightened his eagerness to own it. In his mind he spun one plan after another to achieve his end. He hardly slept a wink.

One day, the prince's servants said that their master had fallen ill and he was not eating any food. At least this was the impression his host was given. The illness seemed to linger on.

One morning the prince called Shaitansingh to his bedside and mumbled out, "My days are numbered. In my dream I was asked to make a gift of all my wealth to a certain mendicant. He lives in a deserted temple on the river-bank. My noble host, will you kindly go to him and beg him to come here?"

Shaitansingh had already heard much about the mendicant. That he stood on one leg for a long time in the morning and did the same thing in the evening. Who wouldn't be impressed by such feats?

Besides, he was indifferent to worldly things. He distributed to the poor all the offerings he received from his admirers.

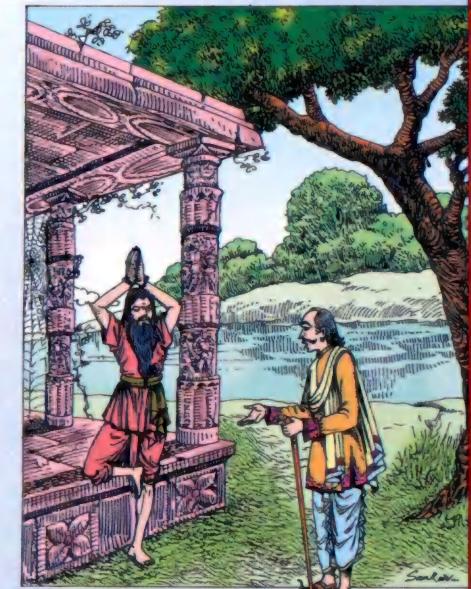
Shaitansingh hurried to the mendicant. With a great show of humility, he requested the holy man to come and meet the dying prince.

"I don't mind fulfilling the last wish of a dying man. But, the problem is, I hardly know the value of gold. Besides, can this lonely temple be a suitable place for storing gold?"

"Don't you worry," Shaitansingh hastened to say. "I know – rather, know very well – the value of gold. I will undertake to sell them on your behalf should the need arise. So far as their safety is concerned, I'm ready to keep them in my house. And I should feel honoured if you, too, are pleased to come and stay with me!"

Shaitansingh made the request feigning love and devotion. What could the compassionate mendicant do but agree to the proposal? He duly arrived at Shaitansingh's house. After showing some reluctance, he accepted the wealth from the dying prince and blessed him.

But lo and behold! Such was the power of the mendicant's blessing that





instead of wasting away, the prince recovered miraculously. Along with the mendicant, he showed a fondness for eating all the best things in the world—at Shaitansingh's expense, of course!

Days passed. The prince at last prepared to return to his kingdom. He requested the mendicant to accompany him. The mendicant was willing to oblige, but how could he go away before disposing of all his gold?

Shaitansingh seemed too ready to come to his help.

"Since you're in a hurry, I can spare you the botheration of going to the bazaar and bargaining with the merchants. I can buy it. The noble soul that you are, I don't

mind paying you a price higher than what you can get in the market."

"How kind of you!" said the mendicant.

Shaitansingh's joy knew no bounds. He paid to the mendicant one-tenth the price of the gold in the caskets. Even then he had to pay such a large sum of money that he was left without a single coin.

An hour after the prince and the mendicant had taken leave of him, Shaitansingh carried a piece of his newly-acquired gold to a goldsmith.

"You call this gold? Ha, ha! Gold? Ha, ha, ha! Next you will call a fly an eagle!" the goldsmith guffawed.

Shaitansingh soon learnt to his great shock that what he had purchased for a large sum of money was hardly worth a pouchful of coins!

He ran to the king and wailed before him, narrating how he had been duped. The king at once ordered his officer to look for the two strangers. Both were still in the city. They came to the king's court most willingly.

The trial began.

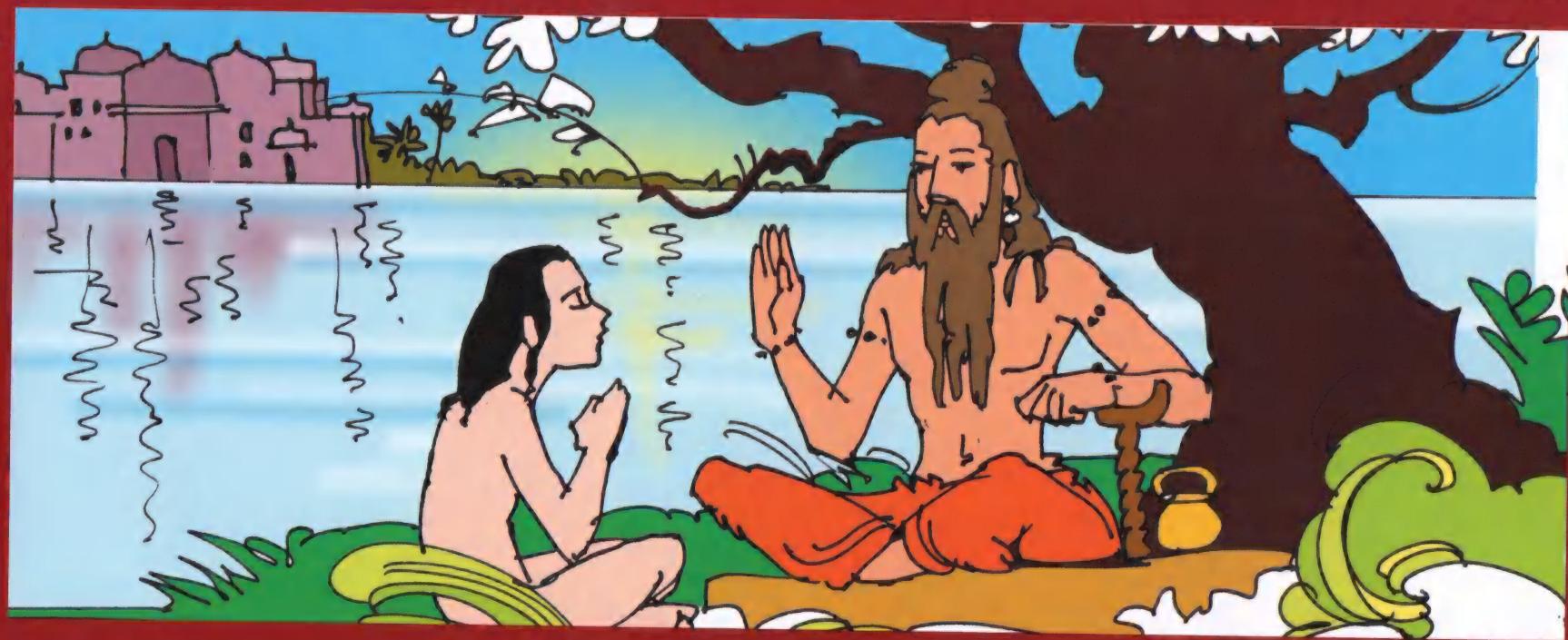
"I did not sell my gold to anybody. I made a gift of it to the mendicant and was cured by his blessing. Since then the gold has been his. I've nothing to do with it," declared the prince. The king found his statement cogent enough.

"I had warned Shaitansingh that to me gold was no different from stone. I had no knowledge of its value. It is Shaitansingh who proposed to buy them. It is he who fixed the price. I distributed the money he gave me among the poor," said the mendicant. The king found his statement cogent enough, too!

"Shaitansingh! I'm sorry for you, but this is a strange situation. The prince cannot be held responsible for what he had already given away. The mendicant cannot be held responsible either. It is you who volunteered to buy his metal. You fixed the price. You should have made sure that what you were buying was gold!" said the king.

The two strangers thanked the king and returned home.

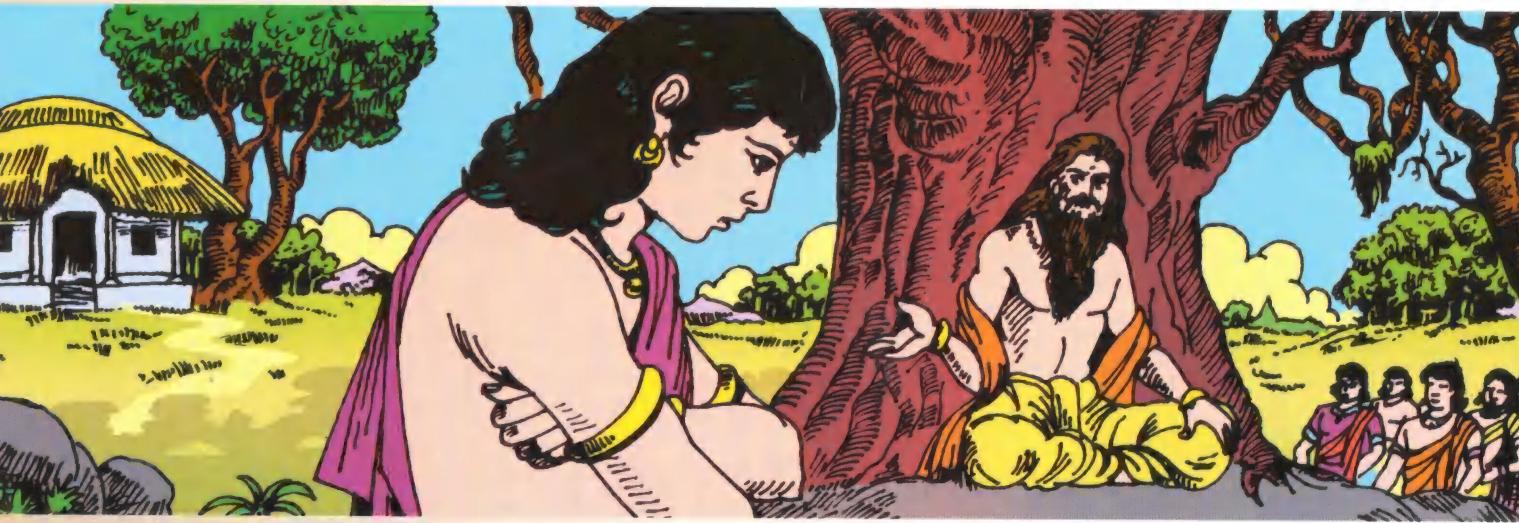
Moral Stories





Moral Stories

As is well known, *Chandamama* was launched with the aim of sharing India's great heritage and culture with the post-Independence growing generation. The young readers, being in the most critical period of their formative years, it was essential to help them imbibe values. This was attempted through stories narrated in an interesting manner and in a language easily understood by them. The stories in *Chandamama* invariably have a moral running through the narration or at the end of it. The stories chosen abound in traits like valour, compassion, generosity, sacrifice, righteousness, honesty, and the like. The messages are made an integral part of the narration without making it didactic. At the same time, they are relevant for all ages and situations and, therefore, popular with the readers, not to speak of the appreciation they evoke from their peers – parents and teachers.



PUBLISHED
IN 1979

Subroto's Mission

A sage had his small Ashram near the forest of Vidyachala. Young men enrolled themselves as his students.

The sage always asked a newcomer, "Why do you want to learn?" The reply that he generally got was this: "We wish to earn a living."

Although the sage kept silent, it seemed that the reply did not quite please him.

One day, a young man named Subroto met the sage and desired to become his student. To the sage's question, he replied, "I wish to study for my own development. Secondly, I wish to use my education for the service of the people."

The sage looked happy. Subroto lived in the Ashram for five years. Then the sage told him, "Now I deem you learned. Go and devote yourself to the welfare of the people."

Subroto chose a small village for his field of work. He served the villagers in several ways and soon endeared himself to them.

But he was shocked to learn that every three months, a gang of dacoits raided the village and looted the houses. Whoever tried to check them was mercilessly beaten.

He further learnt that this had been going on for years. The villagers had reconciled to the situation. They sighed and lamented their plight, but did nothing more. The dacoits faced no resistance.

Subroto called a meeting of the village youth and said, "It is a shame to live in fear and bear the tyranny of the dacoits. How can we prosper if the dacoits plunder the village every now and then? We must unite and face them."

A dozen young men came forward to risk their lives. As soon as the dacoits entered the village, they offered stiff resistance. But the dacoits outnumbered them and, after a fight, took them prisoners.

"Who instigated you to resist us? Answer or die!" the dacoits demanded.

Sensing danger to his followers, Subroto stepped forward and said, "I mobilised them against you."

The dacoits beat up Subroto pitilessly. Subroto swooned. While leaving the village, the dacoits threatened the villagers, saying, "If you resist us again, we will set fire to the whole village! Also, you must drive this audacious young man away!"

There was no physician in the village. The villagers carried Subroto to a well-known physician who lived in another village. Once the physician took charge of him, they left for their homes, without waiting to see him recover.

The fact is, they did not want Subroto to return to their village. They were afraid of the havoc the dacoits would create if they saw Subroto still living in their village. They had decided to resign to their fate.

But Subroto returned a month later. The village-elders no doubt felt a bit awkward at his sight.

Subroto was followed by a gentleman. Said Subroto to the villagers, "People of this village suffer much because we do not have a physician here. On my request, this physician has agreed to live here till he has trained one or two of our own youths. Please cooperate with him."

The people felt overwhelmed with gratitude. Subroto, whose life was in danger

for their sake, still cared only for their welfare! They felt guilty that they were thinking of avoiding him.

All the villagers now decided to confront the dacoits under Subroto's leadership. They practised lathi-play and fencing. Divided into four batches, they secretly guarded the village at four different points.

When the dacoits came next, the villagers swooped down upon them with fury and captured them. They led the prisoners to the king's court in a procession. The king had been looking for that notorious gang for a long time. He was immensely pleased. He rewarded the villagers and appointed Subroto to a high position. It was Subroto's duty to look into the problems that the people of distant villages faced.

C

BY THE WAY
The Singapore edition of
Chandamama, Ambulimama, was
launched in 2003.





PUBLISHED
IN 1983

True Wealth

King Vijaysen of Amaravati was in the habit of donning a disguise and roaming in his kingdom. He believed that this was a far better method of knowing the condition of the people than depending on the report of his officers.

One day, the disguised king was crossing a vast field. He was tired. Just then, sweet music from a flute surprised him. He followed the sound and reached a tree. A little boy sat under the tree playing his flute. The king listened to him, charmed. He felt quite relaxed.

He talked to the boy affectionately and found out that he was an orphan. Sadashiv was his name. He worked for a rich farmer who fed him. The king found him very intelligent.

"Come with me. I'll give you better food, a better clothes and better house to live," said the king.

Sadashiv had no reason to refuse the offer. He followed the king to the town.

Soon the boy learnt who the stranger was. He was pleasantly surprised. The king allotted him a room in the palace. He gave

him fine clothes and appointed teachers to educate him.

Sadashiv studied with great interest. The king talked to him at times and was convinced that the boy was truthful and honest.

After three years, the king told Sadashiv, "You've learnt enough. It is time you took up some work."

"My lord, I'm willing to do any work you would like to give me. But will you please allow me to pay a visit to my village for a few days before I join work?" asked Sadashiv with humility.

"Why not!" replied the king.

In his village, Sadashiv heard many kind words. "How lucky you are!" exclaimed his friends and well-wishers.

"Am I lucky? I'm not sure," responded Sadashiv. All thought that he was being humble.

Upon his return to the palace, the king appointed him the superintendent of his family museum. This was a treasure-house of valuables collected over generations.

The post was always reserved for highly trusted officers who were known to be so honest that they would never steal anything

from the collection. All were surprised that the king offered the post to the young man whose honesty had never been tested. But King Vijaysen acted according to his own impressions and nobody had the courage to question his decision.

King Vijaysen suddenly passed away and his son Krantisen ascended the throne.

Those who were jealous of Sadashiv now got a chance to speak against him to the young king. They told him that Sadashiv was regularly stealing from the museum.

"Where is the proof?" asked the young king.

"My lord, I recently had a chance to enter the museum. Two years ago I had seen a dagger with a diamond on its handle. I observed that the diamond is now missing," one noble asserted.

The young king called for the dagger and found the diamond really missing. But an inquiry showed that his father, the late king, had himself removed it from the dagger and got it set on the handle of his sword.

The suspicious nobles advised the king to ask Sadashiv to draw a list of items in the museum and to compare it with the old list. They felt sure that some of the items

mentioned in the old list would not be there in the new list, for Sadashiv must have carried them away.

The list was prepared. It was the same as the old list. The king went into the museum himself and checked the items. Everything was in its proper place. Sadashiv opened for him rack after rack, chest after chest and almirah after almirah.

But he bypassed one small chest. The king had not observed it, but one of the nobles accompanying him drew his attention to it.

"What does this chest contain?" asked the king.

"My lord, that is of no importance to you. It contains my wealth," replied Sadashiv.

The nobles looked at one another meaningfully.

"Your wealth? What is that?" demanded the king suspiciously.

"Whatever be my wealth, my lord, I was using this with the full approval of your great father, the late king."

"What is the harm if we see your wealth?" the king sounded stern.

Sadashiv sighed and silently opened the chest and brought out its content. They



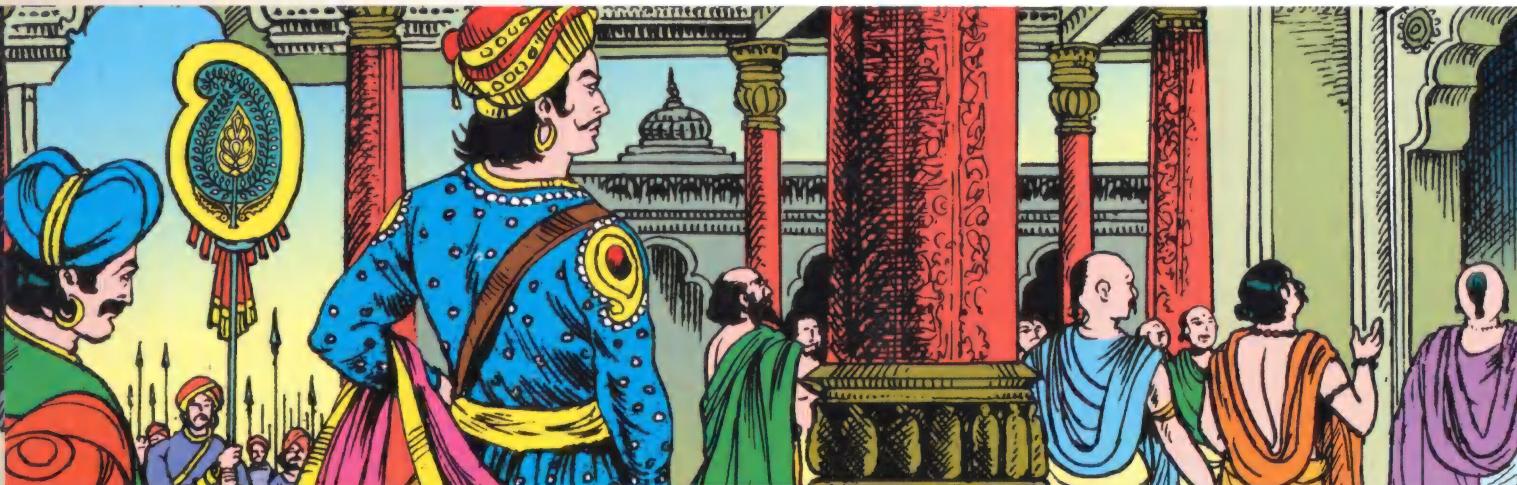
were a pair of worn-out slippers, a tattered blanket and an old flute.

"What is this? Why do you call this your wealth?" asked the surprised king.

"My lord, true wealth is that which gives one peace of mind. As long as I had only these, I spent my days in peace. But, pardon me my lord, though you are giving me high salary and other comforts now, I am without my peace. It is because of the atmosphere of suspicion and jealousy that surrounds me," said Sadashiv ruefully.

The king hung his head. He walked away briskly without even looking at the nobles who had led him there.

Next day, Sadashiv was promoted to the position of a minister. Those nobles who used to complain against him did not show their faces either to the king or to Sadashiv for many days.



PUBLISHED
IN 1982

Strange Experience of a King

This happened long, long ago. King Kalketu ruled Kanchanpur, a peaceful and prosperous land. The people lived happily.

The young king faced no problem as his minister was wise and his officers were honest.

Unfortunately, King Kalketu began to think that all went right because he was a great ruler. By and by, pride and arrogance clouded his mind.

"My lord, wealth or youth or power or fame can all vanish in a moment," his old minister used to say from time to time. He hoped to infuse some humility into the king.

But Kalketu learnt no lesson from his minister's wisdom. He did whatever he liked to do and had never found any impediments on his way. Why should the situation be different in the future? He secretly laughed at the minister's warning.

The nobles in his court and his officers knew that the young king was very proud of his position, but they thought that a king had the right to be proud, after all!

There was an old temple in the town. Famous scholars and devotional singers came there during an annual festival. They lectured on philosophy and sang the glory of God.

The king, along with the nobles, was listening to a scholar on the first day of the festival. "Nothing is permanent," said the scholar in the course of his talk. "It is a great folly to be proud of any possession!" he said further.

The king smiled. "These are only theories," he thought. "Who is there to take away my kingship or my wealth? Why should I not feel proud of them?"

As the discourse was going on, he dozed off.

When he woke up, he could not immediately remember where he was. All was dark. Slowly everything came back to his mind. He was inside the temple. Others had left and the door had been locked.

He groped his way to the door and banged against it yelling, "Who dared to

lock the door while I was inside? How foolish of all to leave me here alone!"

The two guards outside were surprised to hear the banging and the yelling. They had locked the door only after everybody had left. Who knew that a mad fellow was lying asleep in some nook?

They opened the door. The king ran out like an arrow. It was night. He reached the palace gate and started shouting, "Where is my old, useless minister? Where are my bodyguards? How did they come away leaving me behind?"

There was a commotion. The palace guards came rushing and caught hold of King Kalketu.

"Don't touch me, you fools! Don't you recognise your king?" Kalketu shrieked as he pushed the guards back. The result was, the guards pounced upon him with greater fury and threw him, his hands bound, in a cell. As he did not stop shrieking, he was gagged.

In the morning he was led into the king's court. To his utter amazement, he saw someone resembling him seated on the throne.

"Who are you?" asked the stranger on the throne.

The question drove Kalketu almost mad. "How dare you put such a question to me? I am King Kalketu. Whoever you be, you are an usurper!" he shouted.

The courtiers laughed. "Shut up!" shouted Kalketu again. That only made everybody laugh even louder.

"The fellow is either mad or a joker. There is of course another possibility. He could have been drunk. Keep him in jail. We will see more of him afterwards," said the king.

Kalketu was dragged away to the prison. From time to time, he shouted at the guards and officers, "Drive away that usurper! Why don't you understand that I am the king?"

Some giggled at his claim. Some teased him or made faces at him.

One day the stranger on the throne hosted a banquet for the neighbouring kings. "I will show a strange fellow to you," said the host. He ordered Kalketu to be brought there.

Kalketu was made to look like a joker. A pet monkey rode on his shoulder.

As soon as he was brought before the royal audience, he addressed them one by one and said that he was the real king! They



all laughed, but admitted that the joker had been trained well enough to be able to call the different guests by their names! It was a good treat for them.

Time passed. Kalketu, the prisoner, was found to be growing more and more silent. He made no claim about himself any longer.

One day he was led into a private chamber. The stranger on the throne confronted him alone.





"Who are you?" the stranger asked.

Kalketu kept quiet for a minute. Tears rolling down his cheeks, he then said, "I am only a mad man—mad with pride and foolishness. There was a time when I believed that I was a king whose power and position nobody could take away. Little did I know that nothing was impossible! Even my friends, the kings, called me a joker the other day!"

The stranger smiled. He patted Kalketu on the back and said, "My friend,

you are a good man. Pride was your only vice. This experience was necessary for you so that you will shed your pride. Come on, you are the king once again."

To his great astonishment, Kalketu saw that the joker's dress he had put on vanished and he was dressed like a king.

"Who are you?" he asked the stranger.

"I am a spirit. Call me an angel. But now I must look like the prisoner you were and run away to fool the guards into

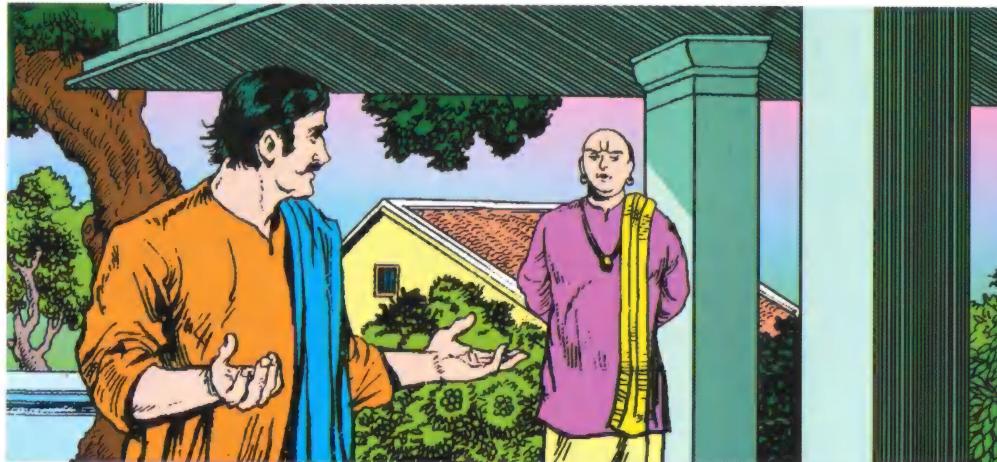
thinking that the mad fellow has escaped," said the spirit.

And, looking like a joker, the spirit rushed out. The guards were about to give him a chase, but King Kalketu stopped them.

The king ruled as an humble and wise ruler. He was revered like a sage, but he never let any pride possess him again.

BY THE WAY

P.C. Sorcar Sr., the magician, was a regular contributor to the magazine. Everytime he performed in Chennai, he gave a special show for *Chandamama*.



Haunted House for Sale

Mohandas met Hiralal, the moneylender. "I have to perform my daughter's marriage. Will you please lend me ten thousand rupees? I will repay in five instalments," he said.

Hiralal could always measure the urgency of one's need. He varied his rate of interest accordingly. The interest he quoted for Mohandas was too high.

"No, my brother, I cannot pay such high interest. I'd better dispose of our old mansion lying useless," said Mohandas.

Mohandas's ancestors were landlords. They had an excellent mansion, but that was in ruins.

Hiralal was annoyed with Mohandas for his refusing to borrow money. He decided to do everything to foil Mohandas's plan to sell the mansion. He floated a rumour that it was a haunted house.

The rumour spread in no time. Some people even claimed to have heard strange sounds and shrieks emanating

from the house! More and more inventions were added to the rumour.

There were only three or four persons in the region who could afford to buy the mansion. But they shied away from it because of its ill reputation as a haunted house.

One day a millionaire from the city came to visit the area. He knew Hiralal well. He was planning to found a factory in that area.

He saw Mohandas's old mansion and was fascinated by it. A wealthy man who always lived in the city, he was accustomed to evaluate property according to their value in the city.

"Who builds houses of such excellent type nowadays? If it could be available to me for a lakh of rupees or so, I would be happy to buy it," he told Hiralal.

"But what do you propose to do with an old deserted mansion?" asked Hiralal.

"If I establish a factory here, I have to visit this place from time to time. I could repair this mansion and use it as my residence," answered the millionaire.

An exciting idea flashed in Hiralal's mind. After the millionaire departed, he





met Mohandas. "If you've put up your mansion for sale, well, I am willing to buy it for ten thousand rupees," he said.

Mohandas guessed that there must be some very special reason for Hiralal wishing to buy it. He said firmly, "I do not intend selling it for anything less than fifty thousand rupees! I don't mind if it lies unsold!"

Even then Hiralal showed his readiness to buy it. Mohandas was as surprised as he was happy; for the building in ruins could not have fetched him more than twenty thousand rupees.

After the transaction was over, Hiralal wrote to the millionaire: "You can now have the mansion for a lakh of rupees."

Came the reply: "I'm sorry. On my way back, I heard that it is a haunted house. I've no intention of living with ghosts. Thanks."

BY THE WAY

By the late '80s, *Chandamama* was coming out in 12 languages, including English. It was the Oriya edition titled *Jahnumamu* which crossed 100,000 circulation first.

The phenomenal success was mainly due to the excellence of the language used by Prof. Manoj Das in his writings. The editions in Telugu, Marathi and Hindi – in that order – soon notched the 100,000 circulation.



Neglected Wife

While Brahmadutt ruled Banaras, the Bodhisattva was born as a counsellor to the king.

On a certain occasion, the king became angry with his son and banished him from his kingdom. The prince left Banaras with his wife and suffered untold troubles in foreign lands for a long time. On several occasions, the prince had no roof over his head. He had to go without food. His dutiful wife shared these hardships without complaining.

As time passed, King Brahmadutt died. The prince was very happy to learn of

his father's death. He could now return to Banaras and sit upon the throne.

So the prince started for Banaras and travelled day and night. In his anxiety to get there as quickly as possible, he neglected to look after his wife's comfort. He forced her to walk as fast as he did and to go without food and sleep as far as possible.

However anxious he might have been to reach Banaras, he could not avoid eating. One day, the couple reached a village in a state of great hunger. One of the villagers saw that they had come a long way without

food and told the prince to come to his house and accept a food parcel.

The prince asked his wife to rest under a tree and went with the villager. He was given a parcel of food that was enough for two. While returning to his wife, the prince told himself, "This food is just sufficient for the two of us. I don't know when we shall be having our next meal. Banaras is still very far off. It is more important that I should reach Banaras. There is no hurry for her. As it is she is being a hindrance to me. But for her I should have gone much farther by now. I must manage to eat all this food myself."

With his mind full of such mean thoughts, the prince returned to his wife. "Here's the food," he told her. "You walk along. I shall catch up with you after my ablutions."

Believing him she wearily walked ahead, and at once the scoundrel ate all the food. Then he made a loose bundle of the cover leaves and caught up with his wife.

"Look at this mischief," he told her showing the empty package. "Those villagers are rogues. They fooled us with an empty parcel. There is no food inside it."

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His wife said nothing, but she understood everything. They travelled on for some more days, and at last arrived at Banaras. The Prince was duly crowned the King of Banaras.

Now the king had no time at all to think of his wife. Though she had shared all his hardships, he did not feel it necessary to share his happiness with her. He never bothered to inquire whether she had good clothes, good food and other luxuries. Thus the queen was completely neglected by the king. She was stricken with sorrow.

The Bodhisattva, the counsellor, noticed the condition of the queen, and one day, he went to see her. The queen received him appropriately.

"After his change of fortune for the better, the king distributed gifts to all of us," he said. "But I haven't received anything yet from the hand of the queen."

"Sir," the queen replied sadly, "I'm queen only in name. There is very little difference between me and the palace maids. I had the duty to share the king's misfortune, but not the right to share his fortune." She went on to narrate to Bodhisattva how, on their way to Banaras, the king had robbed her of her share of

food. "Even now," she said, "the king does not care to inquire whether I have had my food, what clothes I am wearing and so on."

"Do not worry, madam," the Bodhisattva told her, seeing that she was shedding tears. "I've suspected this much. I have come to you only to know the truth from you. Now, let me tell you something. Let us repeat our conversation tomorrow at court. I will see that the king stops neglecting you."

The next day the queen was present at court. The Bodhisattva accused her in the full court that she had not thought of the poor since she ascended the throne.

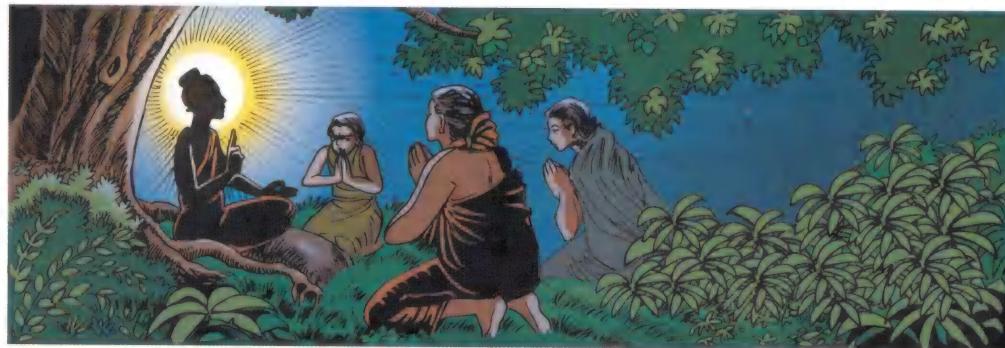
Then the queen told the court all that she had told the Bodhisattva the previous day. The king was put to shame when she revealed how he had robbed her of her share of food while they were returning to Banaras.

"If the king is neglecting you," the Bodhisattva told her, "there is no reason why you should stay with him. It is said: Leave one who has left you. Do not make friends with him. Be not nice to one who frowns at you. Birds leave the fruitless tree and seek other trees. The world is wide."

So, you can go out into the world and seek those who have consideration for you."

Hearing this, the king got up from the throne and fell at the Bodhisattva's feet. "O wise counsellor! Don't put me to shame!" he begged. "I shall, henceforth, treat my wife with respect. I apologise for what I have done."

From then onwards the king treated her with the regard and consideration that she richly deserved.



The Procurator

At the time when Brahmadutt was the ruler of Banaras, the Bodhisattva was employed as the king's procurator.

The procurator's job was to buy the various properties and commodities that were required for state purposes. He had to be an expert in estimating the value of things.

The Bodhisattva would buy elephants, horses, gold, silver and so on for the kingdom and pay the merchants who brought them.

As procurator, the Bodhisattva was very capable, so that the royal stores were always filled with the right things and the best things. He was also very thoughtful and foreseeing in his purchases, so that the administration

was never held up for the want of a particular commodity which was urgently needed. He was also very fair-minded in his dealings with merchants and traders from other countries, so that the name of Banaras was respected in far-off places.

Now, King Brahmadutt was a miser. He thought that his procurator was paying too much for everything and squandering away the state money. "At this rate, I shall be bankrupt in no time," he said to himself.

The next act of the king was to dismiss the Bodhisattva and appoint someone else in his place. This he did in the easiest possible manner. He opened the window of

his chamber and looked down. There were some of his attendants standing about. He selected one of them at random and ordered him to come up. When this unknown and insignificant fellow came up, the king told him, "From now on, you are my procurator."

The king hoped that a common fellow without any rank or status would buy nothing without haggling and would be more economical in his purchases. But this particular man was quite a fool and the king didn't know it.

The new procurator could not distinguish between a donkey and a horse, but he was an expert in offering astoundingly low value for anything he had to buy.

The merchants who came from far off countries could hardly kick up rows with the king's official. So they used to sustain huge losses on state purchases. They had to make good these losses somewhere else.

In his anxiety to buy cheap things, the new procurator bought useless and unwanted things. These began to accumulate in the royal store. Even when some of them were stolen, no one felt their loss.

The foolish procurator could not guess what commodities would be required in the near future. Administration was often held up for want of something that was urgently





needed. Above all, the name of Banaras acquired a very bad reputation abroad and good merchants stopped going to that city for fear of the procurator.

One day, a merchant arrived at Banaras with five hundred horses of very good breed. The king came to know of it and instructed his procurator to buy them up.

The procurator called for the merchant, looked over the horses and fixed their price—a measure of rice!

The merchant was astounded but did not protest. But straightaway he sought the Bodhisattva, the ex-procurator, and told him what had happened.

"The new procurator seems to be a queer person. I depend upon you, sir, to see that I get justice," the merchant said.

The Bodhisattva pondered over the problem for a while and said:

"When you go to court tomorrow to receive the value for your horses, ask the procurator what he is going to pay. When he says, a measure of rice, ask him what the value of a measure of rice is. Let us see what will happen next. I too shall be in the court."

The merchant put his faith in the Bodhisattva, thanked him and took leave of him.

Next day, in court, the merchant addressed the procurator and said, "Sir, you bought from me five hundred horses of the best variety. May I know before witnesses what I am going to be paid for them?"

"Why, a measure of rice, of course. I told you so, yesterday," replied the procurator.

This reply amazed everyone in the court, including the king.

The merchant put his next question, "And may I know before witnesses what the value of a measure of rice may be?"

"Ah, anyone can tell you that. The value of a measure of rice is exactly equal to the value of the kingdom of Banaras and her dependencies," said the procurator.

Like anyone who is considered to be a good bargainer, the procurator was exaggerating the value of what he was paying and depreciating what he was

buying. But being a born fool, he overdid it. That was all.

The entire court resounded with peels of laughter at the stupidity of the procurator.

Some of them even made jokes about it by estimating how many kingdoms each one of them could buy with rice stored in their houses; in how many days a good eater could gobble up a kingdom and so on.

The only persons who could not enjoy the joke were the foolish procurator and the ashamed king who employed him. When some of the courtiers asked the procurator to buy them a couple of palaces for a handful of rice, the king bent his head in mortification.

The Bodhisattva decided to put a stop to this. He stood up and said:

"Do not mock at a man for his ignorance. When a man is entrusted with a job for which he is not qualified, he is bound to make a laughing-stock of himself sooner or later. It is not this poor fellow's fault that he was made the procurator."

The king raised his head and said, "The fault was mine. O Bodhisattva, I have learnt my lesson. No one can do wrong except the king."

The king at once removed the new man from the job of procurator and put the Bodhisattva back in his place.



Truthful and Clever

It was night and two travellers had lodged themselves in a roadside inn.

"What's your name?" one asked the other.

"Truthful is my name. And what's yours?" asked the first one.

"Clever is my name. My father could not have chosen a better name!" said the second proudly.

"I wish my father had given me a different name. Truthful is a great word. It is so difficult to be always truthful. All I can say is I try!" said the first one.

"But it is not so difficult to be clever—I mean for one who is really clever!" said Clever.

The kingdom's capital was the destination for both. The regular road would require eight days to be there. But if one dared pass through the forest, it would take half that time to reach the town. Truthful and Clever had become friends. So, they decided to pass through the forest.

Both had brought with them their food for the road. Said Clever: "Instead of opening both food parcels at the same time,

we can open one parcel first and later the other parcel. What do you say?"

"Fine!" said Truthful. "Let's open my parcel first. Then we can open yours."

Clever happily agreed to it. Both shared Truthful's food for the first three days. The food would have lasted for another day or two, but Clever ate much more than what Truthful ate.

On the fourth day a storm broke out. Luckily they found a deserted house and they took shelter inside.

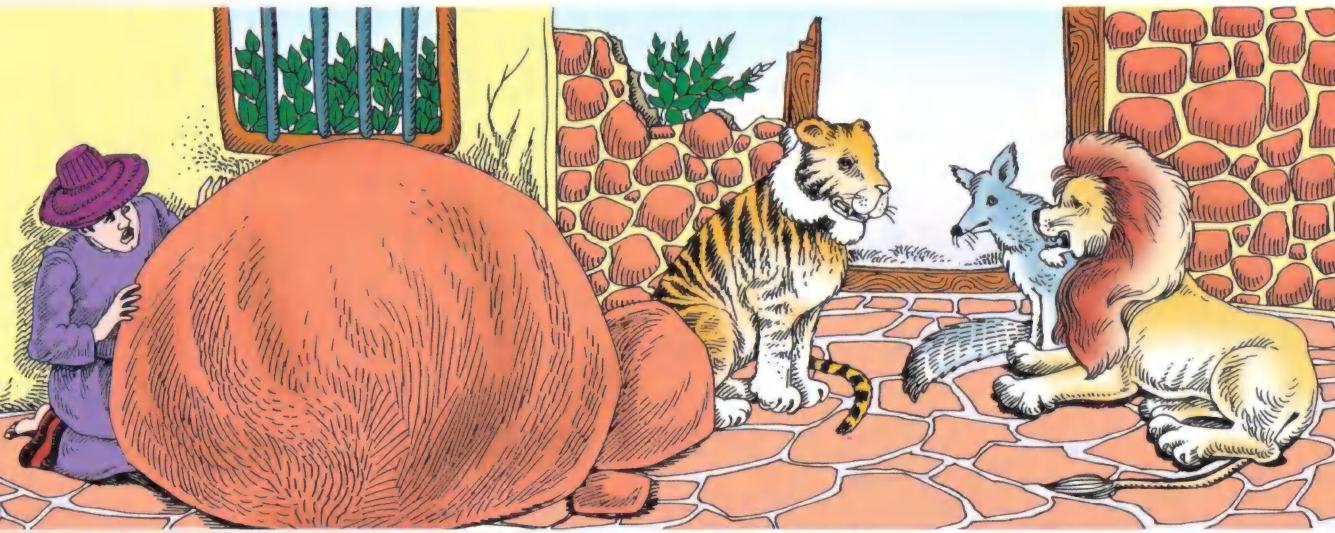
Clever opened his food parcel, but ate from it himself without offering any share to Truthful.

Had he forgotten that his companion too needed food? Truthful was too shy to ask.

The storm subsided, but the rain continued. The next day, when Clever started eating his food, Truthful hemmed and hawed and told him: "My friend, how do you eat without offering me my share? Don't forget that my food was finished because you shared it!"

"My friend, I'm merely being truthful to my name. I'm being clever. I don't know for how long the rains would continue.





Shouldn't I preserve food for myself?" replied Clever.

Truthful sighed and said: "I don't mind going hungry. But someone told me in my dream that if you don't give me my share, you shall one day be shared by others in an undesirable way."

"Never mind your dream!" commented Clever. Next morning, when Truthful opened his eyes, he saw that the rain had stopped and Clever had departed, probably in the company of some other travellers who were passing by. Truthful satisfied his hunger with some fruits from the nearby trees, but

felt too tired to resume walking. He thought of passing that day in that house, hoping that he too would meet with some travellers and join them.

At night he saw some beasts coming towards the house. He hid behind a huge stone lying in a corner. In the faint moonlight, he saw a lion, a tiger and a jackal entering the house.

"I smell a man!" said the lion.

"Possibly some travellers had taken rest here. They must have left, leaving their smell behind! Nobody would care to pass a night in a haunted house in the forest!" said the tiger.

Then they talked of several things. "The princess is seriously ill. Nobody is able to cure her. I know the cure. But how can I enter the palace and disclose it?" said the jackal.

"What's the cure?" asked the lion.

"If the palace guards would not allow a jackal to enter the palace, do you think they would allow a lion to do so? However, the cure is in a mysterious root with which a farmer feeds his cattle. His cattle are the healthiest in the kingdom. But he does not tell his secret to anybody," said the jackal and he told about the farmer and his village.

Before dawn the animals left the house. Truthful left for the farmer's village, met the farmer and requested him to treat the princess with those special roots.

"My friend, I feel nervous at the very sight of the palace. Why, I will faint at the sight of the king! I shall give you the roots. I'm sure you'll receive a handsome reward from the king. You may pass on a share of it to me!" said the farmer.

Truthful reached the palace with the roots and claimed that he could cure the princess.

"Young man, should it be found out that you were merely kidding, you shall lose your head!" he was warned.

Truthful nodded. He treated the princess who got well in a few days. Truthful's success, his conduct, his speech and, above everything else, his truthfulness pleased the king so much that he toyed with the idea of making him his son-in-law!

And soon the king found out that the princess, too, would like that to happen!

So amidst great pomp and show, Truthful was married to the princess. The couple shifted to a magnificent palace. The first thing Truthful did after that was to reward the farmer with a basketful of gold.

It so happened that while he was strolling on his palace roof one evening, he saw Clever passing by the house. He sent his chief servant to call him. Clever could not believe his eyes when he recognised Truthful. He fell at his feet and said, "Sir, pardon this sinner!"

"Don't call me sir; I'm your friend. Had you not left me alone, I would have remained the poor man that I was!" remarked Truthful.

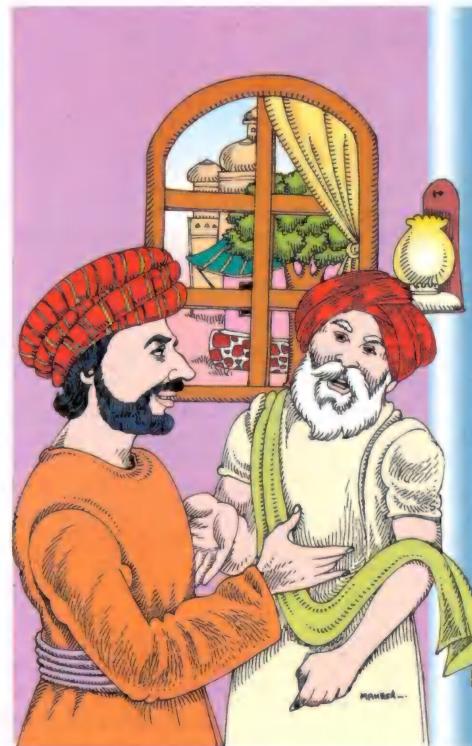
Since Truthful was always truthful, he frankly told all that had happened to him at his companion's query.

Clever enjoyed Truthful's generous hospitality that night and bade him goodbye in the morning. Straightaway he proceeded to the deserted house in the forest and hid behind the stone in a corner. He expected the beasts to come there and talk of more mysteries from which he would profit.

The beasts did come. As soon as they entered, the lion said: "Once again I smell man!"

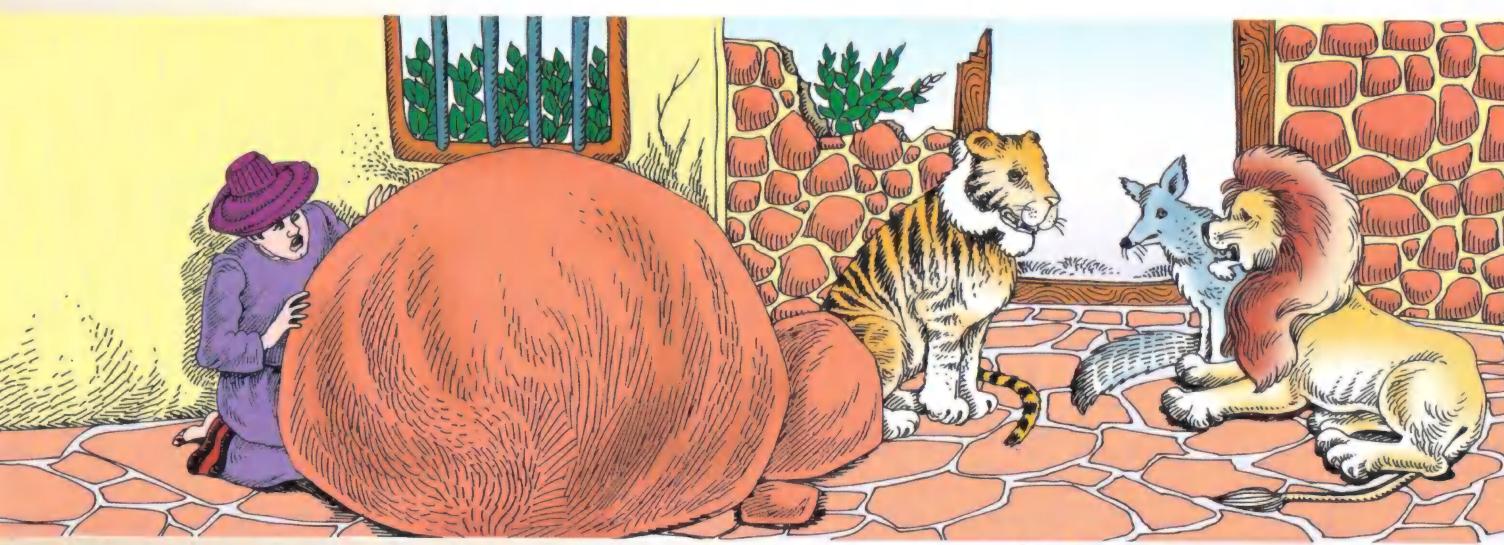
"Well, last time we did not pay heed to your suspicion. In a sense it was good, for the man who heard us from his hiding cured the princess and married her, too! But we were deprived of a good dish. We need not suffer the same loss every time!" said the tiger.

Before long they found out Clever. As they began tearing him to share among themselves, Clever remembered Truthful's dream. But now it was too late.



BY THE WAY

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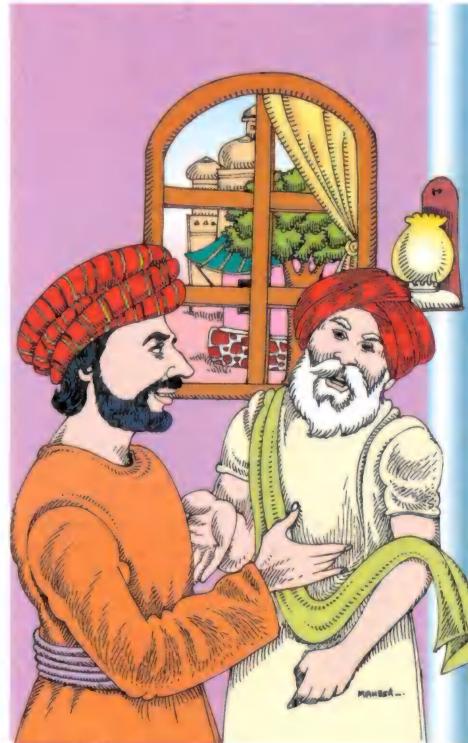
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IN 2001

Who will be a Better Ruler?

The King of Kalinga had two sons, Veerasimha and Rajasimha. Both of them grew up just as their father had wanted. But he was in a dilemma? To whom should he hand over the reins of the kingdom?

One day, he sent for them. "My sons, it's time you both got ready to take over the reins from me, but I'm not able to decide to whom I should hand over power. So, I have decided to give you two years' time to go

out into the world and come back stronger and more handsome. But, remember, you should not reveal your identity."

The princes agreed to abide by the king's direction and set out from the palace the very next day, wearing ordinary clothes and unaccompanied by attendants. Veerasimha had heard of the famous wrestler Balasena, so he went to him straight away and requested him to take him as a trainee to become strong. Balasena agreed. As Veerasimha did not

reveal his identity, he was treated like any other trainee and was not given any special privileges. The training was not easy, and Veerasimha had to really struggle hard to acquire strength. However, constant physical exercises helped his body acquire a glow.

Meanwhile, Rajasimha went over to a village far away from the capital. After a few days stay there, he found that the crops were withering away because there was no proper irrigation, the village had no proper roads and the people were facing a threat of famine.

As he had dressed himself like a common man, Rajasimha could manage to stay with some of the villagers, who poured out their woes to him. He was very upset. He went to the village chief and discussed with him how the situation could be improved. "I feel if the villagers make joint efforts, the village can be saved from misery."

The village chief, with a scorn, said: "Nothing can improve matters, young man; you're only wasting your time offering advice to us. You better mind your own business."

Rajasimha was shocked by the way the village chief reacted. He decided to go against his father's instructions. He revealed his identity. When the village chief realized

that he was speaking with none other than the prince of the land, he changed his attitude. He immediately called a meeting of the villagers and introduced the prince to them and said Rajasimha would help them improve their affairs.

The prince then addressed the villagers and gave them some suggestions. As they listened to him in rapt attention, an aged villager got up and said, "O Prince! This village has been under the spell of a curse for a long time. That's why we are all suffering."

"Please take it as if the curse has been lifted," said Rajasimha reassuringly, "and from now on, let us start afresh to bring prosperity to this village. I shall give you all guidance and each one of you should abide by my orders."

Most of those assembled in the village square felt enthused, and promised to work as the prince directed. Others were afraid of punishment if they did not cooperate, so they too agreed to follow his instructions.

Work started in right earnest. They gave priority to water conservation and proper irrigation methods to trap all water going waste. Several wells were dug, and a dam constructed. The crops about to wither

away now got new life and the harvest was better than expected. Next, they undertook afforestation and the newly planted trees grew fast and sturdy. New roads were laid, which facilitated the villagers to go to the nearest towns and markets. All the activities were supervised by Rajasimha.

At the end of two years, the prince took leave of the villagers and went back to the capital. At the palace, he found that Veerasimha had already returned.

The king sent for them and took a good look at them. Veerasimha was, of course, looking very handsome, sturdy and strong. Rajasimha was equally strong and sturdy, but he seemed to have acquired a dark tan by exposing himself to sunshine for long hours and continuously for several days.

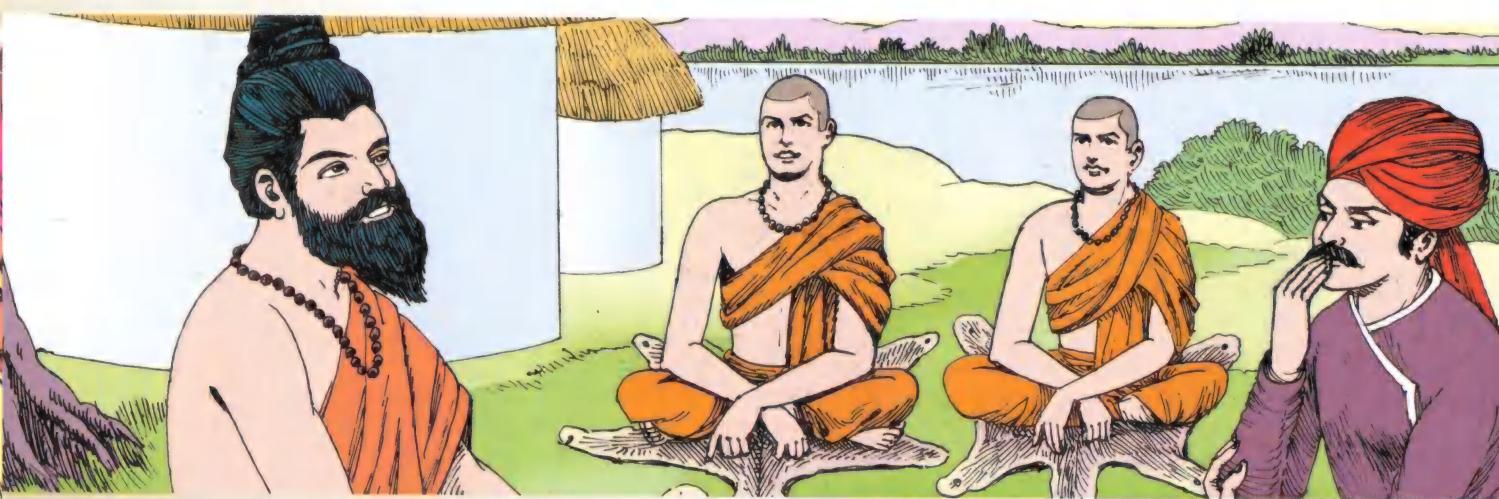
The two princes narrated to the king how they spent the two years. Veerasimha did not have much to say, except about his body-building exercises and physical and martial feats. "Father, look at Rajasimha. Does he come anywhere near me in handsomeness?" said Veerasimha. "You should make me your successor."

The king laughed aloud. "The duty of a ruler is to strive for the well-being of his



subjects, instead of doing everything for his own comfort or pleasure. I quite agree, a king has to be strong and sturdy; you both are strong and look sturdy, but that does not make you, Veerasimha, an ideal ruler. On the contrary, Rajasimha has learnt what is meant by people's welfare. He did not think about himself all through the two years. He aimed at the upliftment of the villagers. So, I feel he'll make a better ruler than you. However, you be the commander of the army, and help Rajasimha by ensuring that peace prevails in Kalinga."





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IN 2004

For the Sake of a Staff

Ram and Prakash were disciples of a great Rishi, Vanacharya. Both proved to be excellent scholars. They learnt the Vedas, the Upanishads and other scriptures with great attention. They also achieved several Siddhis.

Vanacharya's hermitage was on the banks of river Sarayu. His own guru lived in a valley in the Himalayas. One day he was met by a traveller who told him that his guru would like him to proceed to the Himalayas without any loss of time.

Vanacharya stood up. "I must go," he announced to his disciples. "Take care of yourselves."

Surprised, they asked him, "Guruji, what's the urgency?"

"What can be there more urgent for a disciple than his guru's summons? I must hurry," answered Vanacharya.

"But, sir, shouldn't you arrange for the smooth running of your hermitage before you leave?"

"Things will take care of themselves," replied Vanacharya.

"When do you propose to return, sir?" asked the disciples.

"I don't know; I may not return at all!" Vanacharya did not wish to continue the conversation. He crossed the river forthwith and headed for the Himalayas. The two disciples and the hermit's local admirers bade him farewell.

Ram continued to stay in the hermitage; but Prakash left for his native place where he led the life of a holy man. By and by he gathered many disciples and grew quite famous as Prakash Baba. But he led an extremely austere life. He lived in a small thatched hut. All he had for his personal use were a strong staff, a brass pot and some clothes.

However, he was very unhappy to hear that Ram, who was now known as Ram Baba, was leading a luxurious life. One of his disciples, a wealthy landlord, had built for him a comfortable house and provided him with servants. He was also supplied with delicious food cooked especially for him in the landlord's kitchen.

"What a fall!" thought Prakash Baba. He decided to warn his friend about the dangers of falling into the trap of worldly temptations.

At last one day he arrived in Ram Baba's ashram and found that what he had heard was not untrue. "My dear friend," he told Ram Baba when there was nobody around, "is it right on your part to be tied down to such comforts in life? They will only distract you from your real aim. Better come away with me to my hermitage, far from this place, and begin your spiritual pursuit anew."

"Why not, if that's God's wish!" said Ram Baba.

Just then one of their old friends came in a hurry and said, "Guru Vanacharya is waiting on the other side of the river. He'll be there only for a short while. He wishes to see both of you. Maybe, he would like both of you to accompany him to the Himalayas."

"What a great coincidence it is that I am here," said Prakash Baba. But he hemmed and hawed and said, "If the Guru asks us to accompany him, how do I inform my disciples about it?"

"The Guru will decide," was Ram Baba's response. But Ram Baba himself did not inform anything to anybody.

Both of them proceeded to the banks of the Sarayu. The ferryboat was full with passengers, but it could take two or three more.



Suddenly Prakash Baba remembered his staff. It was an elegant thing, with a shining metal knob.

"Ram, you proceed. I'll be back with my staff I had left in your room. I shall take the next ferry," said Prakash Baba. By then Ram Baba and the Guru's messenger had already stepped into the boat. The boatmen began rowing immediately. Prakash Baba was back in half an hour. Meanwhile, there had been a flash flood. The ferryboat did not return from the other shore. And there was no possibility of Prakash Baba crossing

the river before the flood receded. That might take several days.

Prakash Baba sat down on a rock and wept. He realised how foolish it was of him to advise his friend against comfortable living. His friend, living amidst luxury, had no attachment for anything. He did not even feel it necessary to inform his disciples about his decision. For him, God was there to take care of everything. But living an austere life outwardly, Prakash Baba had not been able to liberate his mind from bondage to his measly possessions. He lost the golden chance of being with his Guru for the sake of a mere stick!



Thus the Sea became Salty

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Long long ago, in a village close to a forest lived two friends, Suza and Yamar. Suza was strong and smart. Yamar was not exactly weak, but was lazy. If they found some ripe fruit on the branches of a tall tree, it was for Suza to climb and pluck them. But he would let Yamar choose from them first.

They grew up. Both got married. Suza lived in a small house and earned his living through hard work, whereas Yamar lived comfortably because his father had left him a few acres of land.

But Suza and Yamar continued to be friends. It was a habit with them to go into the forest whenever both had leisure. One day they entered a cave. Suza's attention went over to some small stones which appeared to shine in the darkness. He picked them up. When both came out of the cave, he showed them to Yamar. Yamar examined them. His eyes flashed with excitement, but he said casually, "I am to

visit the town tomorrow. I shall find out if they have any value."

Yamar went to the town the next day. His guess was right. They were precious stones. He sold them and returned home with wealth enough to be counted among the rich. To Suza he gave a few coins and said, "Well, they were practically worthless. However, a wealthy man bought them for decorating his flower-vase. Here is half of what I got."

Yamar built a mansion, bought horses and employed a number of servants. "I chanced upon some buried wealth in my ancestral house," he told his neighbours.

Suzu was glad that his friend had prospered. "In times of need I can seek his help, after all!" he told his wife. His wife was not so sure. She even suspected that the stones Suza had found were the source of Yamar's prosperity.

One day Suza headed towards the cave alone. He needed some money badly to buy some medicine for his little son. On reaching

the site, he found Yamar entering the cave. "What are you doing here?" asked Suza.

Taken aback, Yamar mumbled out that he was just passing by and entered the cave with no specific intention. "But what brings you here?" asked Yamar in turn. "Well, I came here to see if some stones are there," answered Suza truthfully. "Very good. Let's search together. If we find more, once again I can carry them to the town. You're too innocent to extract a good price for them," said Yamar. They looked everywhere under rocks, but to no avail. They came out of the cave and walked homeward. "It may rain. Let's hurry," said Yamar and he walked faster than Suza.

"My son, would you kindly lift this stack of dry wood and place it on my head?" said an old woman who sat under a tree, looking appealingly at Yamar.

Yamar hurried away after casting a contemptuous look.

"Granny! Let me carry the stack for you," said Suza as he lifted the burden and

placed it on his own head. He followed the woman to her hut and kept the stack down at her door.

"My son, it was so sweet of you to help me," said the old woman. She then brought out a piece of cake and gave it to him. "You look hungry. Eat this cake. It will not only satisfy your hunger but cure you of diseases if you have any."

Suzu was happy. Though it was not a big piece, he decided to give it to his ailing son.

He had hardly taken a few steps when someone called out to him in a piteous tone: "O passer-by, I'm dying of hunger. Can you give me something to eat?" asked a stranger lying on a slab of stone. Alas, he gave the impression that he was gasping for the last few breaths of his life. Suзу lost no time in offering him the cake he had. The dying man ate it with relish and sat up.

"Good man, here's a small gift for you. Did I say small? Indeed, small in appearance but great in performance," said the stranger. He then handed to Suзу a small wheel made of bamboo sticks. It had a handle. "Ask for anything you really need and turn the wheel towards right. As soon as your demand has been fulfilled, turn it to your left so that it

stops giving you more. Do not depend on it forever. You must work honestly. When you have got everything to lead a reasonably carefree life, throw it into the sea."

Suzu thanked the man, accepted the wheel and resumed walking.

It was too much to believe that a mere bamboo wheel could grant him anything he needed. He needed some money for his son's medicine. No doubt, his friend Yamar would come to his aid.

It had started raining when he reached Yamar's house.

"My friend, I need some money badly. My son is ill and ..."

"Suzu, please come in and have some food. But now that I have numerous friends, I cannot go on helping every friend's ailing sons!" said Yamar.

"But I promise to pay back what you lend me!"

"Must I repeat what I said?" asked Yamar.

"Thanks, you need not," said Suзу. He sighed and went home.

"What have you brought, Father?" asked his ailing son, looking at the bamboo wheel in his father's hand.

"Ha ha!" Suзу laughed with some anguish and said, "Well this is expected to give us some food!" he said light-heartedly and turned the wheel to the right.

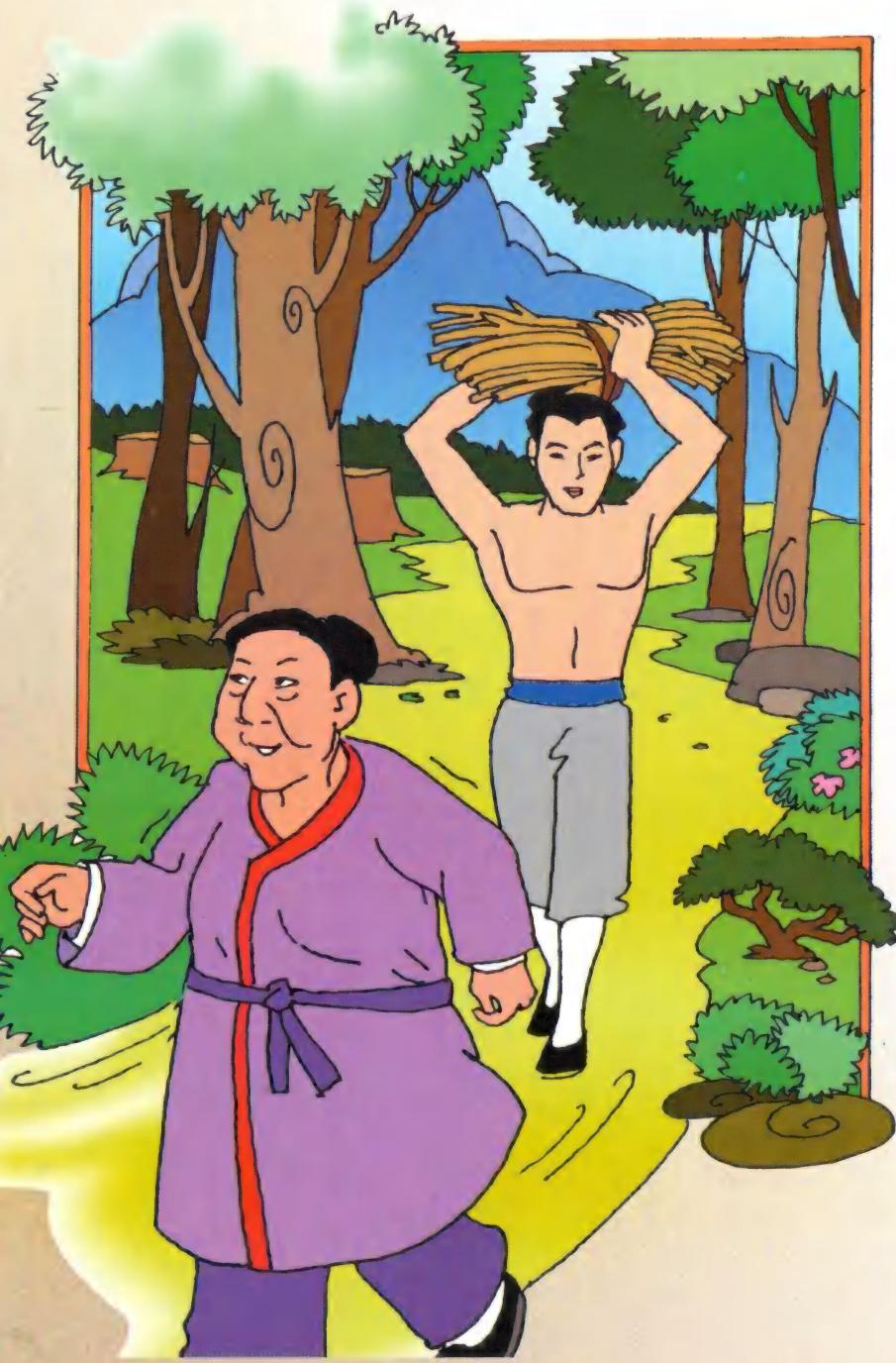
Lo and behold, there were several items of food ready to be eaten. Suзу turned the wheel to the left. Suзу, his wife and son – all remained speechless. Suзу then asked the wheel for the medicine that would cure his son. It was there. The little boy took it and felt fine. By then a heavy downpour had begun. Suзу's roof was leaking. "Let us have a reasonably good house." His wish was fulfilled.

The whole village saw with amazement that Suзу had come to own the most elegant house in the region. Yamar goggled and surveyed it, his mouth agape. "How was it possible?" he asked his friend. "With God's Grace," replied Suзу.

By and by, Suзу obtained from the magic wheel whatever he needed to live comfortably.

Yamar lost his peace of mind and even sleep. Night after night he would loiter around Suзу's house and peep through the window to find out the secret of his prosperity.





One night he saw Suzu turning the wheel to the right after asking it for a stone image of the deity he worshipped. Once the idol was there, he told his wife, "It is time I threw the wheel into the sea. We have enough. We must not forget how to labour and earn our living."

"I agree," said Suzu's wife.

Yamar now knew the secret. He observed where Suzu kept the wheel. At midnight he managed to steal it away. He brought a boat the next day and sailed towards a small island not very far from the mainland. He wished to create a palace and fit it with every conceivable luxury. Then he would shift his family there so that Suzu did not suspect him of stealing the magic wheel.

He had carried some food with him. After an hour's sailing, he felt hungry and began to eat the food. The cook had forgotten to add salt. He smiled. He turned the wheel to the right asking it for salt. Instantly there was a heap of salt in front of him. But the wheel went on producing more and more salt. Soon he was scared of the load on the boat. But he did not know how to stop the heap from growing. As he looked on with panic, the boat began sinking. Two boatmen swam towards Yamar's passing boat. But Yamar did not know how to swim.

He went down into the sea along with the boat.

But the wheel went on producing more and more salt. The whole sea became salty. Even today the wheel is giving out salt so that no amount of rain falling on the sea can make it any less salty! That explains!



Discipline

While Brahmadutta ruled Banaras, the Bodhisattva was born as a Master Sculptor at Takshasila. Princes from far-off countries went to him to learn the art of sculpting.

The king received several reports of the Master and decided to send his own son to study the art under him.

None of the ministers and other courtiers liked this idea. The prince was hardly sixteen. How could he live alone at far-off Takshasila, serve the Master, and learn art? "O King," they said, "don't we

have enough sculptors in our own kingdom? Why should the prince undergo an ordeal?"

But the king did not agree with them. In the kingdom, the boy was a prince and as such he would never learn anything properly. At Takshasila, he would be an ordinary person; he would serve his teacher and learn things in a disciplined manner.

The prince was given only a pair of thin slippers and an umbrella. He was asked to carry a bag of one thousand silver pieces. "Walk all the way to Takshasila," the king told his son, "pay the Master the thousand pieces of silver, obey him and learn the art

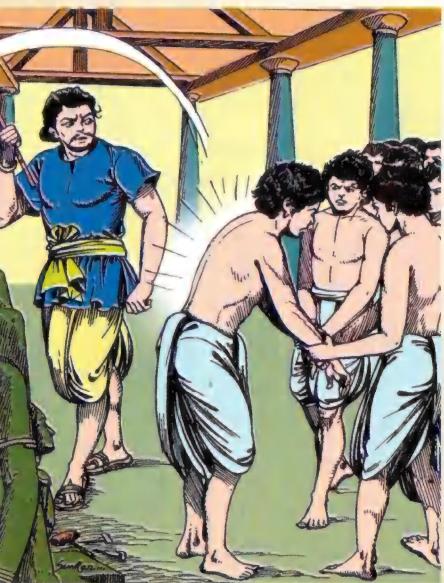
from him. Come back after your education is complete."

The prince had a hard time carrying the bag, walking the long distance, resting under trees, sleeping on hard ground, eating whatever he could get, and having no one to look after him. He finally reached Takshasila and went to the Master, told him the purpose of his coming, handed him the money, and joined as a pupil. The boy was very sharp and quick in learning, and the Master was satisfied.

The Master and his pupil used to go to the river every morning for bathing. One day, as they were having a bath, an old woman came there with a basket of groundnuts. She washed them and spread them on a cloth. The prince saw this, finished his bath in a hurry and came out of the river. When he thought the old woman was not looking, he grabbed a handful of nuts and put them into his mouth. The old woman noticed everything but said nothing.

The next day the same thing happened. The old woman ignored it again. But, when the boy repeated the offence on the third day also, she got very angry. "Good sir," she told the Master, "your pupil has been stealing my groundnuts every

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day. I do not mind the loss much. But this boy is a thief and a real blot on your great reputation. Punish him so that he will stop thieving in future."

On reaching home, the Master ordered his other pupils to hold the prince by his hands and gave him three strokes on his back with a cane. "I punished you," he told the prince, "because you did something bad. Don't you ever do it again!"

The prince was in a terrible rage, but he could do nothing. Though he was a prince in Banaras, he was a common man here. Also, the Master had the right to punish his pupils.

"When I become the king," he swore to himself, "I shall get him to Banaras on some pretext and have him killed."

In the course of time, the prince completed his studies. Having got ready for his journey back to Banaras, he touched the feet of the Master and received his blessings. "Sir," he said, "I request you to come to Banaras after I become the king. I shall then be in a position to give you the reception that you merit." The Master was glad to hear these words, and he promised to make the trip to Banaras in due course.

In course of time, the prince became the king. One day he thought of the vow he had taken in regard to his teacher. So he invited the Master at Takshasila.

The Master accepted the invitation but did not start for Banaras at once. The boy had ascended the throne only recently, he thought. Let him enjoy his new status for some time. He could go and see him later.

Some time later the Master made the trip to Banaras. When he went to see the king, the entire court received him with great respect because he was a teacher to the king himself. He was made to sit next to the king.

The rage that was smouldering in the breast of the king began to grow into a fire at the sight of this old man who had once dared to punish him. In the midst of general conversation, he suddenly turned to the Master and said, "Sir, one who dealt out punishment for a mere handful of groundnuts is surely fit to be put to death. Tell me, is it not so?"

None in the court save the Master could understand what the king said. He wanted the Master to undergo the tortures of a doomed man. He was going to die anyway.

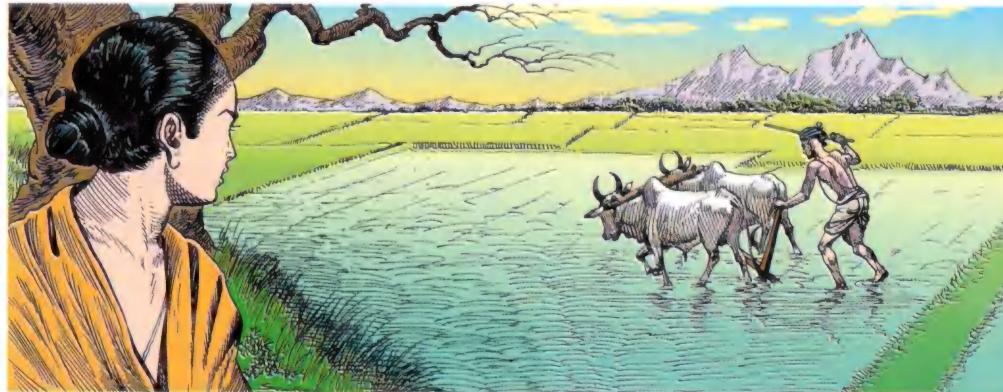
But the Master was not shocked as the king expected. On the other hand, he revealed the king's secret in the court.

"O King," he said, "while you were my pupil and under my charge, you did something which was beneath your status. It is the duty of the teacher to punish his pupil when he does something wrong, and to make him walk the path of rectitude. Had I not punished you that day, you would have been a bandit by now, instead of occupying this dignified throne. A wise man would never get angry with one who punished him for a misdeed; on the contrary, he would be grateful!"

Now that the entire court knew of his misdeed, the king blushed with shame. He fell at the Master's feet and cried, "O Great One! I made one more slip and you've pulled me up once again. I'm really grateful to you!"

By saying these words, the king earned the respect of not only the entire court but the Master himself. The king insisted that the Master remain with him for good. So the Master gave up his residence in Takshasila and settled down in Banaras.





The Needy

While Brahmadutta ruled Benares, Bodhisattva was born to a poor Brahmin. He was named Somadutt. His father cultivated a small bit of land that he possessed and somehow managed to run his family.

When Somadutt came of age, his heart was filled with pity for his aged father who broke his back working on the land from morning till night. In order to bring happiness to his father, he thought of acquiring education and securing employment. He could have, of course,

shared his father's drudgery, but that would not have added to the income since the land was very small. So, he told his father, "Let me go to Takshasila and acquire learning."

Somadutt went to Takshasila and studied under a guru. After completing his studies, he returned home. His father was still labouring on the land with the help of a couple of bullocks. He could not bear to see this state of affairs even for a moment. The very next day he proceeded to Benares and found employment in the king's Court.

Soon afterwards, one of the bullocks died, and Somadutt's father became helpless. The animal was supporting him and now it was no more. He thought of his educated son in the king's Court. Surely, he could get a bullock gifted by the king. The old man went to Benares and met his son.

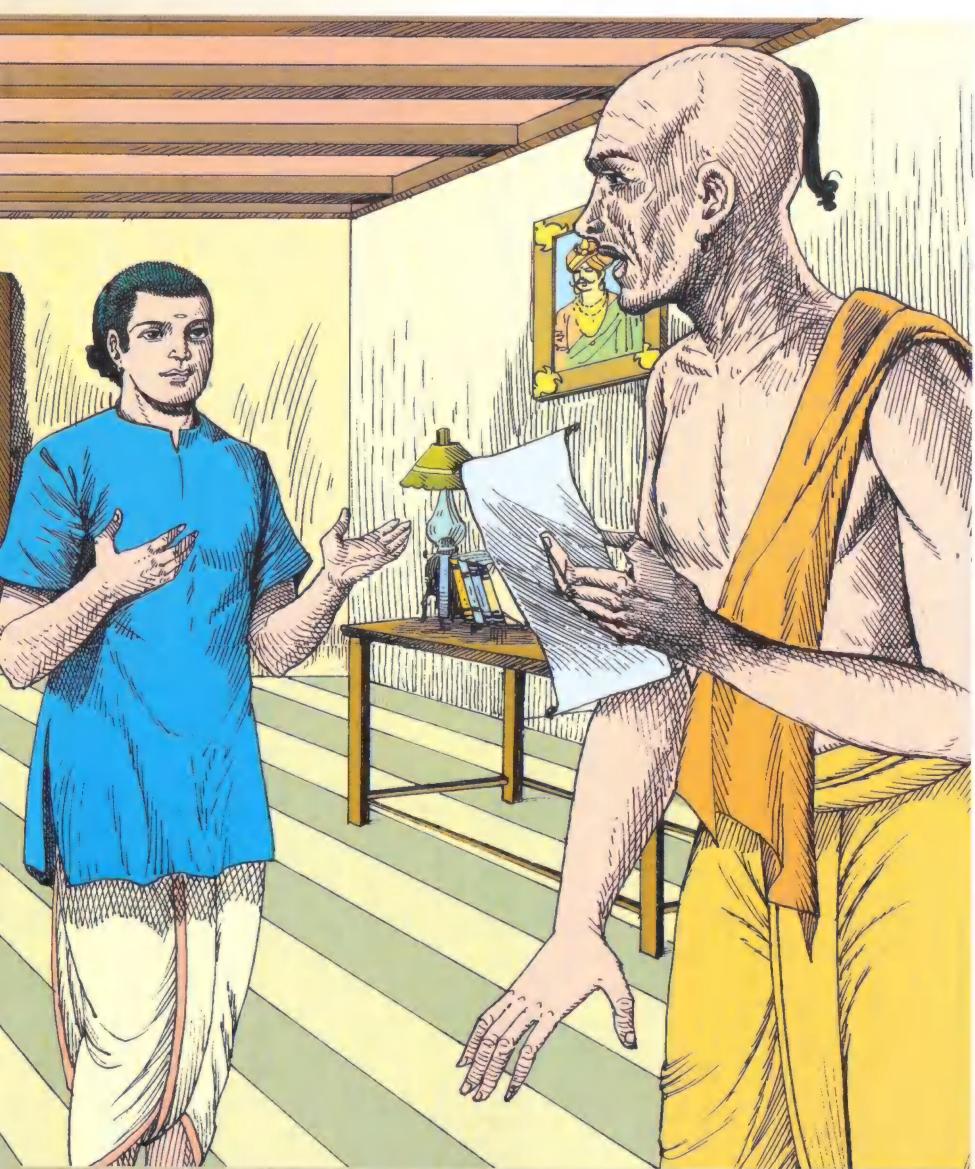
"O father," Somadutt said, "you're too old to toil; so is mother. Why don't you both come and stay with me? You'll be comfortable."

"No, son," the old man replied, "I've all along lived on that bit of land, and I intent to die there. Get me a bullock, and I shall live happily, cultivating my land. I won't be happy here."

Now Somadutt had been in employment in the Court only for a short time. He had not set aside enough income to buy a bullock for his father. And he felt delicate to ask for a gift from the king; he might take him to be a greedy man.

"Father," he said, "if I ask the king for a bullock, he might ask me why I want it, for whom I want it, and so on. In any case, it is not fit for an employee of the Court to beg for favours. You don't have such limitations. Tell the king what happened and plead for the gift of a bullock. He may not deny you."

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"Son, I'm a villager. I don't know anything other than driving the plough," said the old man. "How can I enter the king's Court, face his majesty, and ask him something? I'd die of fright, first. I don't even know how to word a request. So don't put me to all this trouble. Ask the king yourself."

"Then," said Somadutt, "I'll make the task easy for you. I shall write out a verse. Get it by heart and recite it before the king. He'll give you what you want."

The old man agreed to this arrangement. Somadutt wrote the following and gave it to his father:

*O King, I used to have two bullocks.
I was tilling the land with their help.
Now one of them is dead.
So, O King, give me another.*

With great difficulty, with his son's help, the old man learnt the verse by heart.

Then Somadutt took him to the Court along with him. As per his son's instructions, the old man folded his hands before the king as well as the ministers and stood expectantly.

"Who are you?" the king asked him. "What do you desire?" At once the old man began to recite the verse. But in his confusion he made a mistake while reciting the lines!

Instead of saying, "Give me another bullock," the old man said, "Take the other bullock."

Everyone burst out laughing. Somadutt hung his head in shame.

"Is it to offer me your second bullock that you've come all the way here?" the king jokingly asked the old man.

"Yes, your majesty," the old man replied boldly. "It has given me enough trouble already." He then narrated all that had taken place.

The king was most pleased with the behaviour of Somadutt. Every employee in the Court was in the habit of seeking petty favours from the king under some pretext or other.

But even in dire need, Somadutt would not do that. The king ordered that eight pairs of oxen be dressed and decorated. He then gifted them to the old man.



The Answer was Simple!

In the good old days, there lived a wealthy merchant. He was as stingy as he was selfish.

One morning he set out on business to a faraway town. He hired a young man named Yusuf as his servant to accompany him.

"But, Master, I may not be able to bear the strain of the long travel," murmured Yusuf.

"That's no problem. I'll share the strain with you," said the merchant.

The merchant rode his horse loaded with goods, while Yusuf ran ahead. The merchant never gave him an opportunity to ride even for a little while.

All day long they thus journeyed with some rest from time to time. In the evening they came to a place where the merchant decided to halt for the night. After they had pitched the tent and eaten their supper, the trader asked his servant to take the saddle off the horse and keep guard while he enjoyed some sleep.

"Master, what about our sharing the strain? Shouldn't you let me sleep for half the night while you guarded the horse?" proposed Yusuf.

"My boy, I can solve the issue of sharing your strain in a different way. It will be strenuous for you to guard both the merchandise and the horse at the same time. So, you guard only the horse outside the tent; I shall guard the merchandise inside the tent."

Yusuf obediently sat outside the tent, leaning on the trunk of a tree and kept vigil. As he was tired, soon he too fell into a slumber.

Suddenly, in the middle of the night, his master's voice startled him. "What are you doing, Yusuf?" asked the merchant in a sleepy tone from under his shelter.

"I'm pondering!" replied the servant with a presence of mind.

"What are you pondering over?" enquired the merchant.

"What do I do, if coming to pluck a rose, I see only thorns and no rose?"

"Well, you should simply walk away without touching the thorns. No doubt, you are an alert watchman! Keep it up, my

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boy!" exclaimed the master and went back to sleep.

A couple of hours passed. The trader awoke and asked again, "Tell me, O my servant, what are you doing now?"

Yusuf, who had in fact just closed his eyes, woke up again and replied in a lazy strain, "I'm still wondering, my master!"

"What are you wondering about, this time?"

"Oh! What will happen if the sun suddenly decides not to rise tomorrow?"

"Why should I bother? I'll walk away without waiting for the sun, as soon as it is dawn!" said the master with a satisfied note and then caught up with his sleep.

Some more time lapsed and it was nearing dawn. The merchant got up once again. "Do you hear me, Yusuf? How are you doing now?" he asked.

"I'm still in deep contemplation!" was the plain reply.

"Well, you are still pondering and wondering?" asked the master, satisfied that his faithful servant had so long very attentively kept watch over his horse.

"Yes, indeed I'm pondering, wondering and thinking deeply that yesterday, O Master, you rode the horse and I ran in front. But today, who will ride the horse and who will run in front if there is no horse?" said Yusuf in a slow, measured tone.

"The answer is simple! We both will walk together!" replied the merchant, as it took some time for Yusuf's words to sink into his dull mind. But when they did, he burst out of the tent like an arrow. He saw only the saddle lying on the ground and his handsome horse was nowhere to be seen. He bemoaned his fate and buried his head between his hands.

Nevertheless, from that day onwards, to everyone's surprise, a change came over the selfish trader. He realised that had he shared Yusuf's strain and guarded the horse for half the night, Yusuf would not have fallen asleep making it easy for the thief to lead the horse away.



The Man Who Went Forward

Long long ago, in a small village lived a poor man named Haridas. He earned his living by toiling the fields of the wealthy.

But there were not many wealthy people in the locality and they had not enough work to offer him day after day.

Once it so happened that he went without any work for three consecutive days. His family was on the verge of starving.

"Let me go into the forest. Maybe I'll find some edible fruit or roots," he thought and entered the forest.

After some searching, he found some juicy guavas hanging from a tree, quite ripe. He was delighted. He climbed the tree and plucked them. "This much should do for today," he thought as he climbed down.

On his journey back home, he saw a hermit seated under a tree. The old man looked so weak that Haridas was sure he had not eaten for many days. "I can give him my share of the guavas. I can pull on for yet another day without any food," he

thought and he quietly kept a few guavas before the hermit.

The hermit opened his eyes and smiled. Haridas bowed to him. "This is my humble offering to you, Sir," he said. "I wish I could give you something more valuable. But I'm so poor!"

The hermit smiled again, but said nothing.

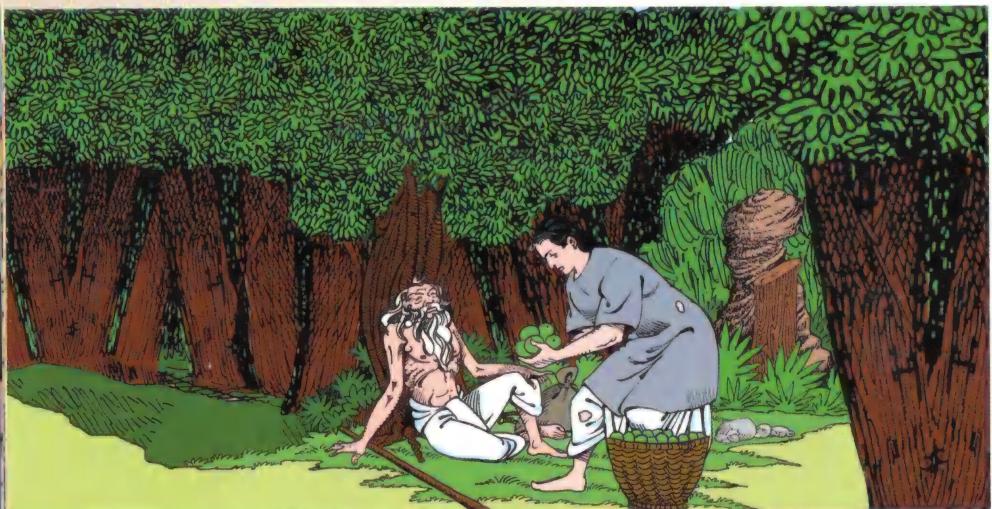
"Sir, give me a word of advice before I leave you. I would consider myself fortunate to hear your voice," said Haridas.

"Go forward, my boy!" said the hermit and he closed his eyes.

Haridas decided to act as advised. He stood up, turned and began walking forward. He had not gone far when he found a piece of silver lying before him. He picked it up and straightaway went to the bazaar. He sold it and returned home with a bagful of rice, vegetables, sweets, and some surplus money.

Next day, he went into the forest with sweets for the hermit. But the old man was not to be seen.





Suddenly Haridas thought, "The hermit had asked me to go forward. He had not told me how far! Let me go farther."

He started walking. In a dense area of the forest, he found a piece of gold. He returned home, delighted. He sold it in the town for a good price. He constructed a house, bought lands and opened a shop in the village.

He prospered. Years passed. Then, one day, he wondered, "Why should I not go still farther?"

He began walking into the forest and passed the spots where he had found the silver and the gold.

Suddenly what should he see but a piece of diamond lying before him! He carried it to the king. Experts said that a diamond of that quality was not there either in the royal collection or among the queen's jewellery. The king bought it. He was also impressed by Haridas's humility and goodness. He invited him to visit the court from time to time.

Familiarity with the king brought Haridas prestige in society. After a year the king made him a noble in his court. By then he had become a prominent merchant and landlord. His sons managed his business and his property well.

Once in a while Haridas would feel a strong urge to meet the hermit and convey his gratefulness to him. But he never saw the old man again, though he looked for him, here and there in the forest time and again.

One day Haridas asked himself why he should not go even farther forward! Next day he took the path meandering through the forest and never stopped walking till it was evening. In fact, he lost track of time. He had crossed the spot where he had found the diamond.

He stumbled against a rock and realised that it was dark. He had come deep into the forest. He must find shelter for the night.

He looked in every direction. Soon he saw the flicker of a light. He advanced towards it. There was a small hut. Inside, in front of a lamp, sat an old man. Haridas tiptoed in, knelt down and gazed into his face. Yes, he was the hermit he had met some twenty years ago. The hermit had not changed.

"The hermit had given me the keyword that brought me prosperity, but he himself continued to dwell in a hut. Why? One who could lead others to prosperity could have prospered himself if he wished to!" Haridas continued to reflect on the question.

The hermit opened his eyes and smiled. Haridas suddenly seemed to have found the answer to his question.

"What do you want now?" asked the hermit.

"Master! Give me the kind of prosperity you have got!"

"Why not! Don't stop going forward!" said the hermit.

Thereafter, Haridas was seen neither in his village nor in the royal court. Going forward had assumed a new meaning for him. It was an adventure no longer into the forest, but into his own consciousness. The hermit was his example.





Misplaced Heroism

Virkumar's parents died when he was an infant. He was brought up by his grandfather, Raghav.

Raghav was a hard-working farmer. Single-handed, he could turn his piece of land into a plate of gold. It yielded him a rich crop year after year. Raghav maintained himself and his grandson reasonably well and could also save some money.

All the villagers loved Raghav. That is why they loved Virkumar also. The boy was pampered by all. That, unfortunately, did not prove good for him. As he grew up, he

refused to learn or work. He whiled away all his time in the company of other village boys.

Raghav grew old. With age, his capacity to work declined. He could not till his entire land; he could not raise healthy crops as he used to. At the same time, he was unhappy on account of Virkumar's conduct. Several times he advised the young man to learn to work. But the fellow turned a deaf ear.

One year Raghav took to bed, beset with pain in his joints. He could not go up to his fields. He also began spending

whatever saving he had made. An elderly widow of the neighbouring house prepared food for them. But Raghav could not afford rich or delicious food. Virkumar felt irritated. He rarely came home. Along with two or three of his friends, who were vagabonds like himself, he began stealing. The gang often threatened the shopkeepers in the bazaar and forced them to part with a share of their earnings.

One night, while Virkumar lay on the verandah of an inn, one burglar was attracted towards his bag. The fellow would have decamped with Virkumar's belongings if a small street dog had not violently barked at him. Virkumar woke up and, with the dog's help, not only chased the burglar away, but snatched the burglar's purse from his waist-fold.

Virkumar patted the dog and fed it. From that moment, the two became inseparable companions. By and by Virkumar's dog grew up to be the most ferocious creature in the area, just as Virkumar was the most dreaded man. With the dog by his side, Virkumar grew bolder. Small traders who came from distant places to the bazaar were his targets. In darkness, along the bushy road, he confronted them and plundered their belongings.

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IN 2000



Virkumar was very proud that everyone feared him. Alas, pride does not last. The landlord of the region used to get information about the menace that Virkumar's dog had turned out to be. He himself was an expert hunter and he kept a ferocious giant dog. One day, he rode towards Virkumar's village while his dog ran with the horse. The moment the landlord's dog saw Virkumar's dog, it pounced on it and tore it to pieces. Virkumar's dog died with a piercing howl.

The villagers saw the incident from a safe distance. Instead of sympathising with Virkumar, they seemed to enjoy his loss. They greeted the landlord and some of them even said: "Thank you, sir!"

Virkumar saw darkness all around him. He suddenly felt that with his dog gone, he had been reduced to a zero. Since his friendship

with his dog, his other friends, all rowdies, had left him. He had nobody to console him.

That evening, after a long time, he returned home. By then Raghav was on the verge of death. Vigour came back to the old man for a moment at the sight of Virkumar.

"My child, I've heard everything. No muscle power, no dog, can ever be one's security. If you're proud of your physical strength, some day you shall be humbled by a stronger person. If you're proud of your cleverness, some day you shall be snubbed by a cleverer man", said the dying Raghav.

"What then is your advice to me, grandfather?" asked Virkumar, sobbing.

"My child, be humble. If you've strength, use it for serving someone in need."

These were almost his last words. When he died, the villagers did everything to perform his last rites. His immediate neighbour, Sudarshan, invited Virkumar to his house and fed him.

Next day, in the evening Virkumar overheard Sudarshan's wife telling Sudarshan: "You shouldn't go to the fields today. You have fever."

"I've to go. Last night some thieves cut away the ripe crop from the fields near

our field. Who knows, tonight it may not be from our field?" said Sudarshan.

From the verandah Virkumar said loudly: "Uncle, please allow me to guard the crop in your field tonight. I'm strong enough to offer resistance to any plunderer".

Sudarshan was unwilling to leave the job to Virkumar. But Virkumar insisted on taking it up. A lathi in hand, he went across to the field.

At midnight, the villagers heard some shrieks and shouts from the fields. Some of them went out to see what the matter was. On seeing them, the thieves fled. In fact, the thieves had come as a gang to plunder the lands of several villagers. Virkumar single-handedly had checked them, inflicting injuries on so many of them. In the process, he himself had been wounded.

The villagers brought him back to Sudarshan's home. He was nursed by his family and recovered soon. By now, he had become the hero of the village. In due course of time, he married Sudarshan's daughter and lived an ideal life.

"Virkumar was always a vir (hero)," the villagers said. "But his heroism was temporarily misplaced!"

History in Pictures





This cottage in the Chandamama building at Vadapalani served as Mr. Nagi Reddi's office. It was witness to several historical decisions in the history of Chandamama.

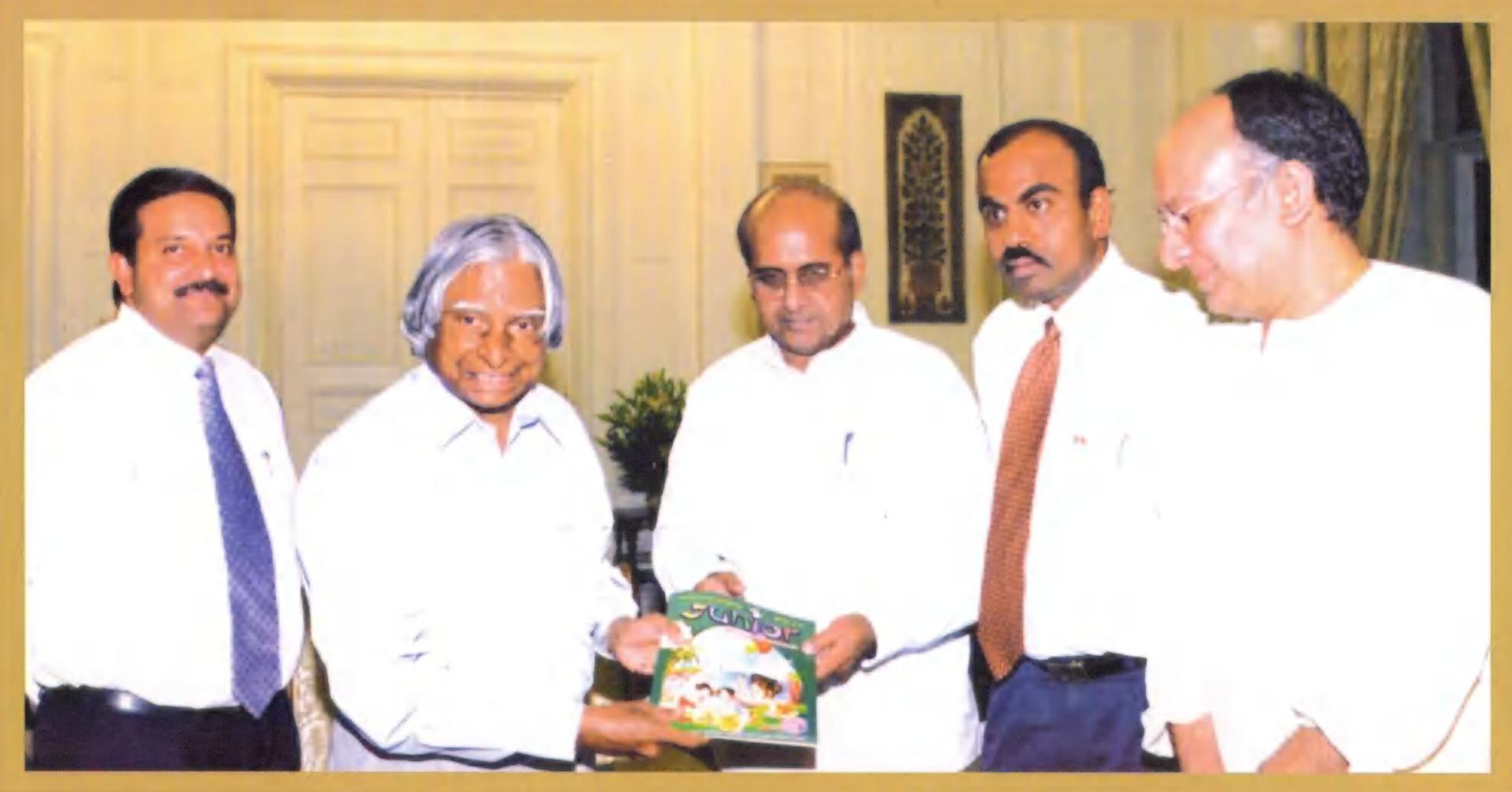


Mr. H.N. Robinson, the first *Editor* after the English Edition was revised



(Left) Mr. Dassari Subramaniam receives *Long Service Citation* from Director Visual Sethi, as Mr. B. Viswanatha Reddi looks on.

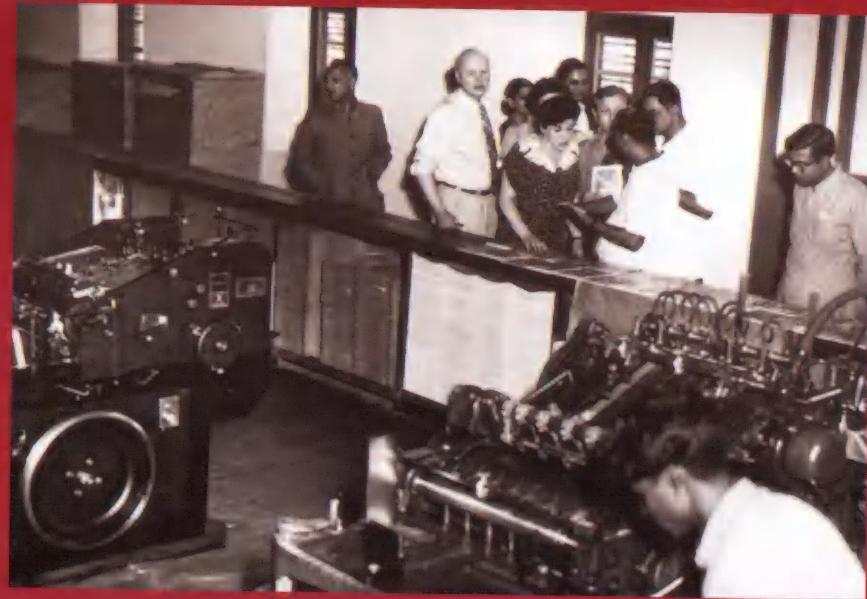
(Right) Mr. Sivasankaran receiving the *Long Service Citation* from Director Sudhir Rao.



At Rashtrapati Bhavan, when the inaugural issue of "Junior Chandamama" was blessed by the then President Dr. A.P.J. Abdul Kalam on April 10, 2003.
From Left to Right: Dr. Sudhir Rao, Director, Mr. B. Viswanatha Reddi, Editor/Publisher, Mr. Sinna Karuppan of Singapore, and Mr. Vinod Sethi, Director.



Automatic binding department



Visitors at the BNK Press

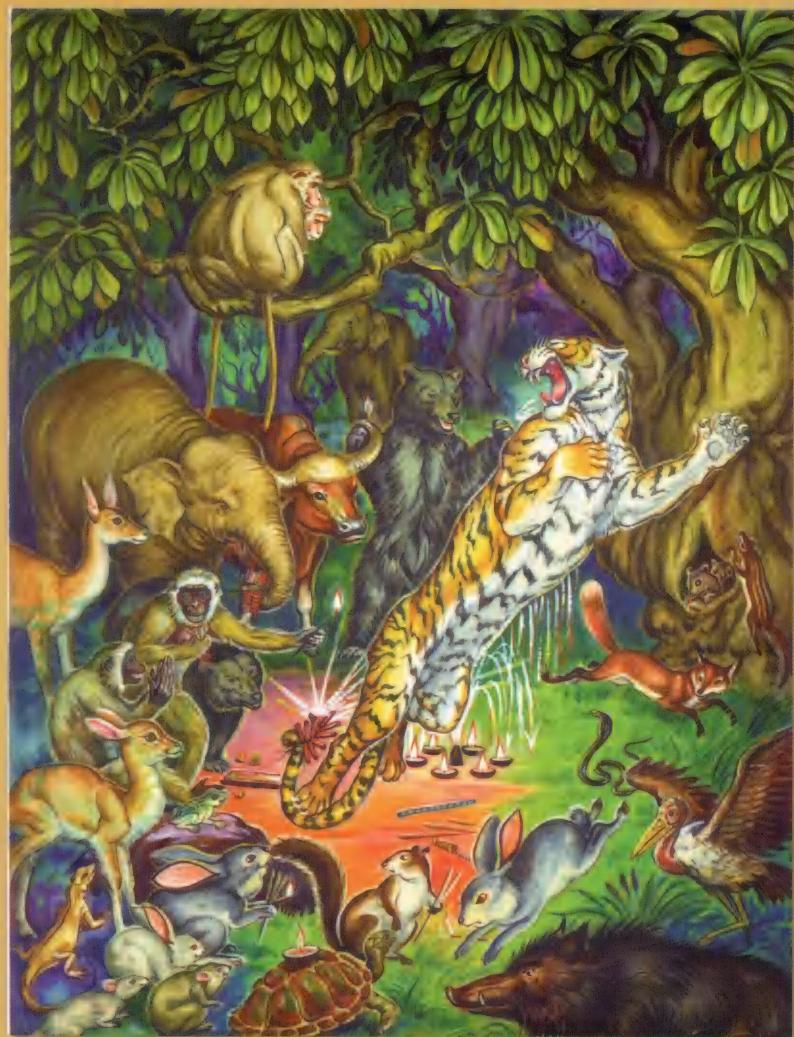
Art Gallery

Of every magazine, it is the cover that attracts the eye first and creates an immediate impression. For children's magazines, this is doubly so. If *Chandamama* is known for the variety in its content, there is no doubt the pictures on its covers for the past sixty years had had a great impact on the readers. The four-colour paintings are an epitome of the objectives of the magazine and a showpiece of the high creative talent of the artists who made them. The following pages showcase paintings from the brushes of eight artists who were associated with *Chandamama* between 1947 and 2007. In a way, the paintings also signify the evolution of the magazine and the changing times. The more than 800 paintings that had appeared in *Chandamama*'s thirteen editions are the quintessence of the Indian tradition, worth preserving for posterity's sake.

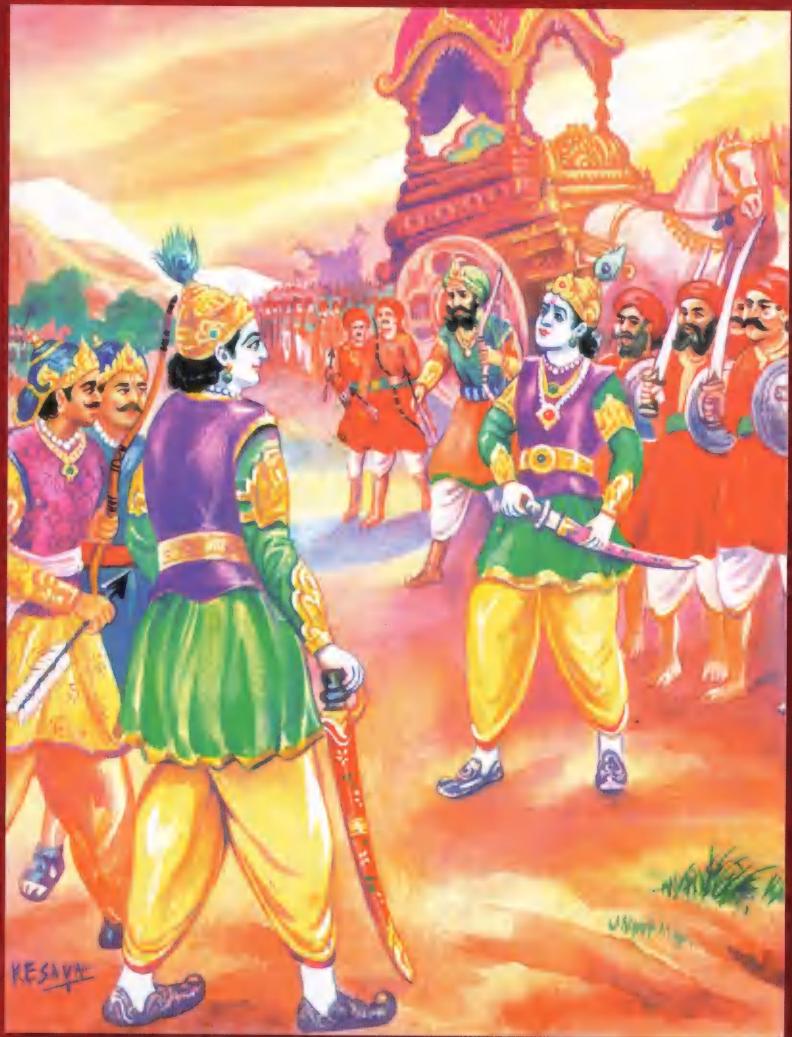


1948

M.T.V. Acharya

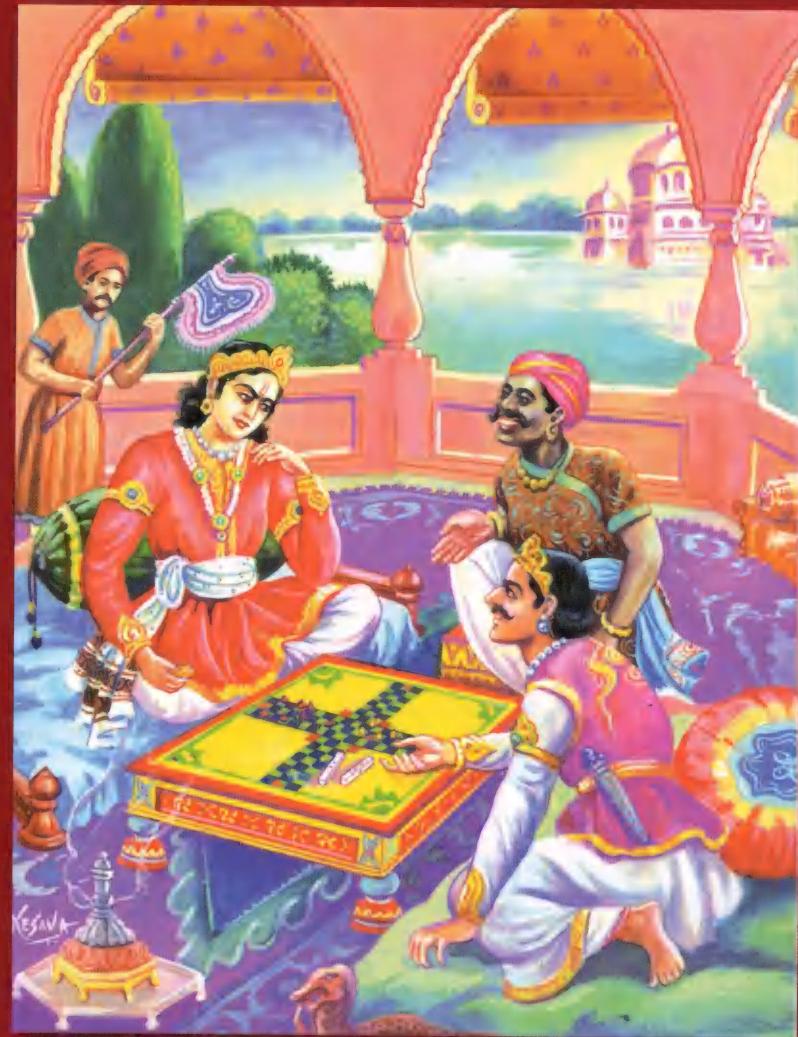


1956

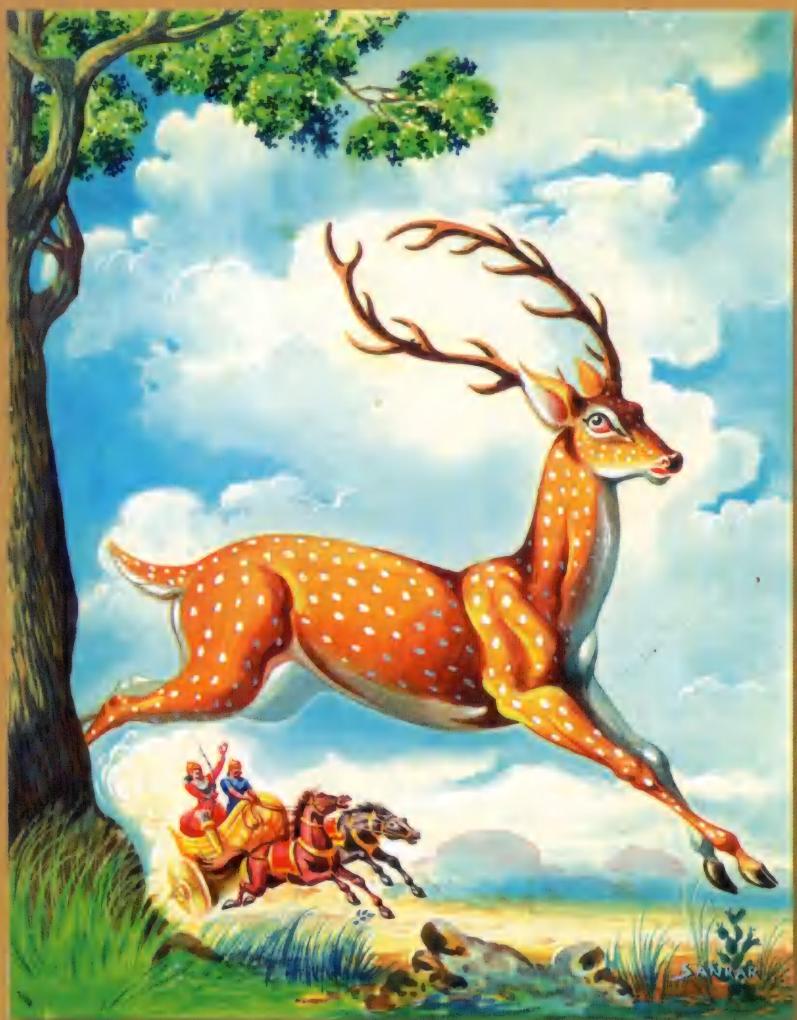


1951

Kesava Rao (*Kesava*)



1951



1955

K.C. Sivasankaran (Shankar)

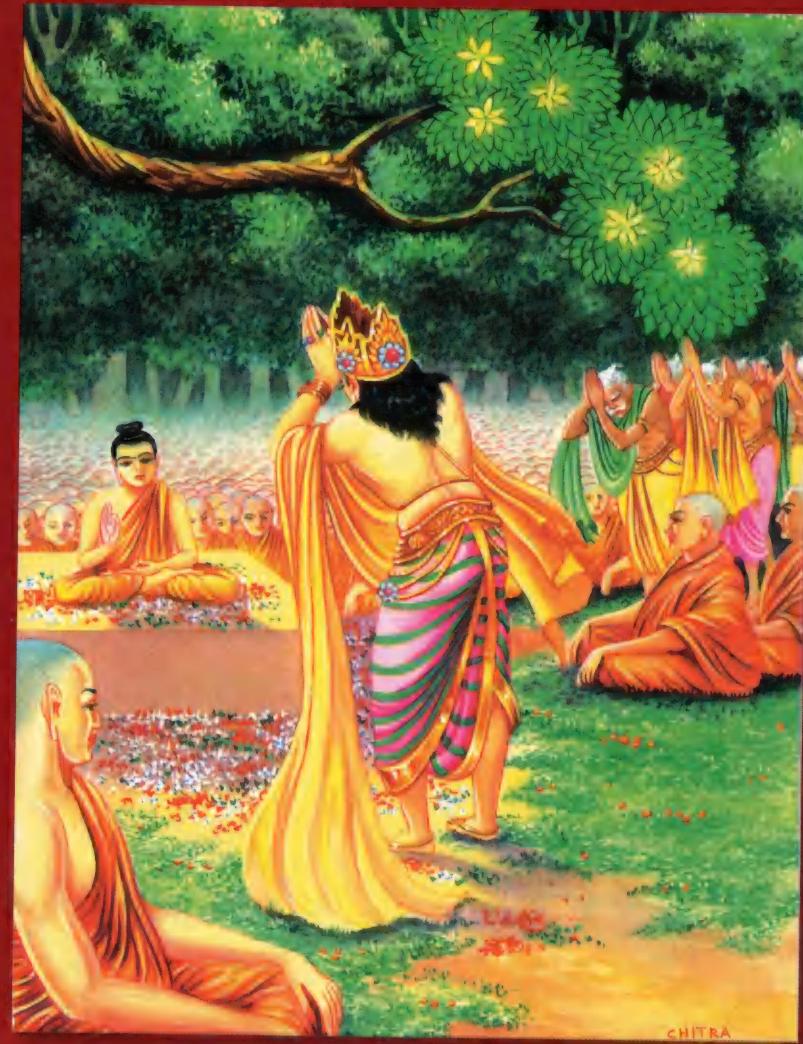


1955



1959

T. Veera Raghavan (Chitra)



1959



1961

Vaddadi Papaiah (Vapa)



1981

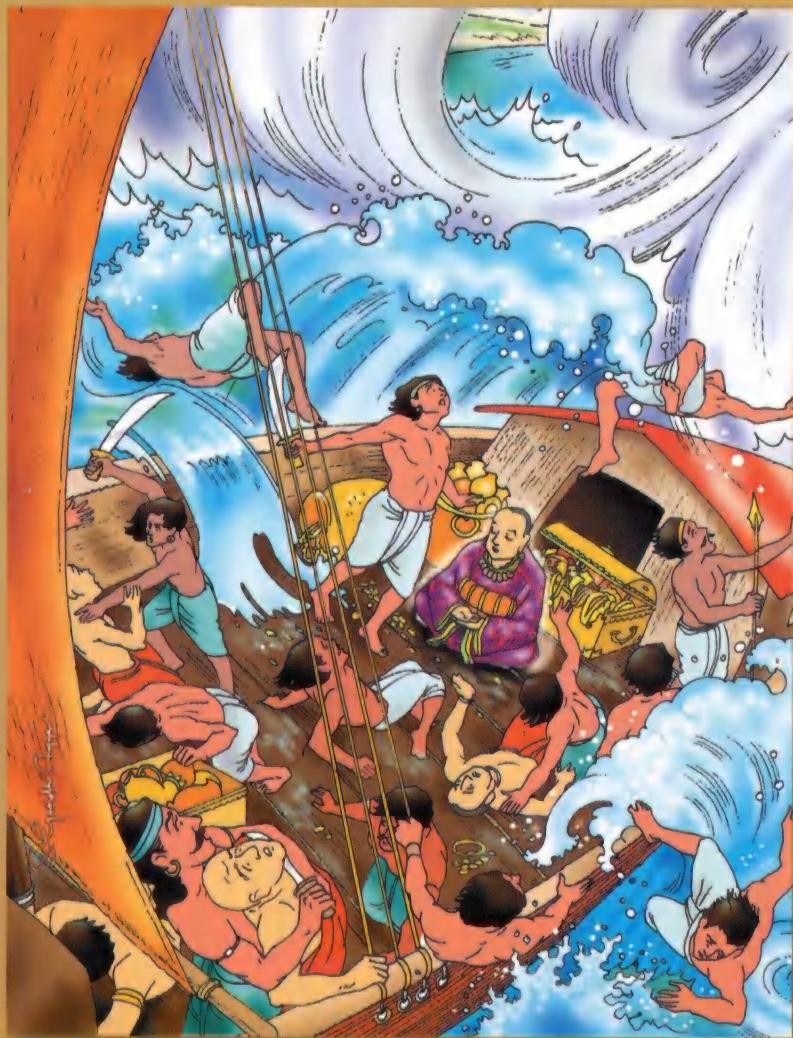


1981

M.K. Basha (*Razi*)



1983

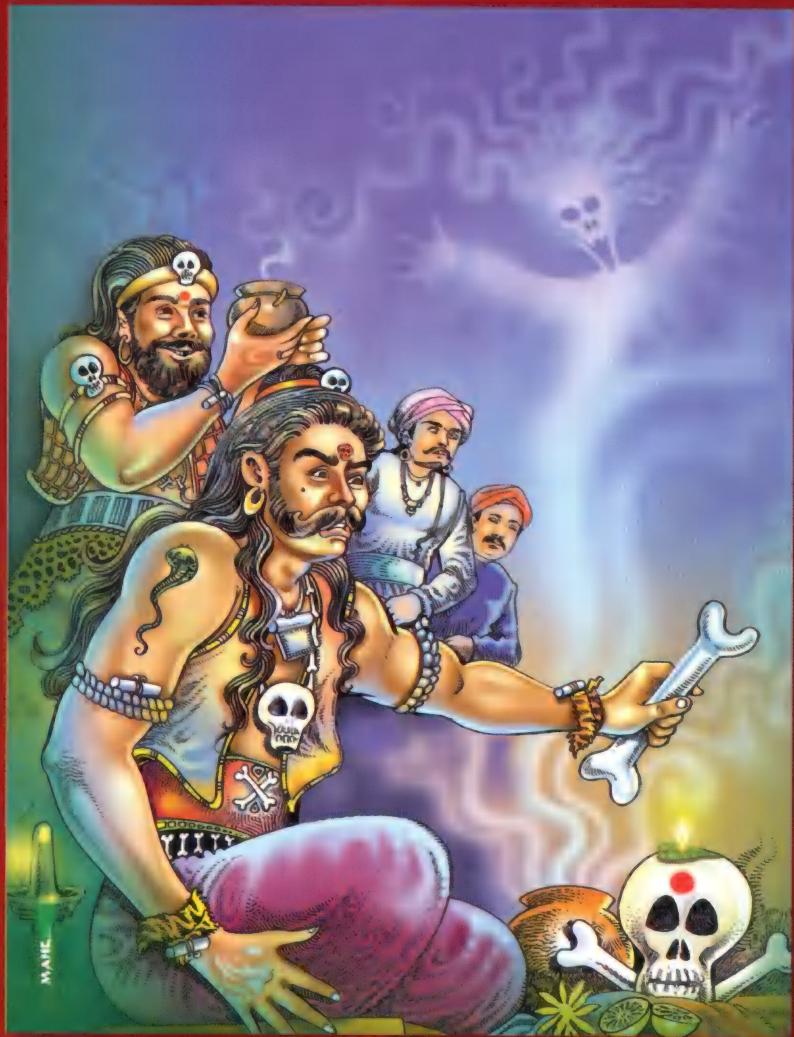


2002



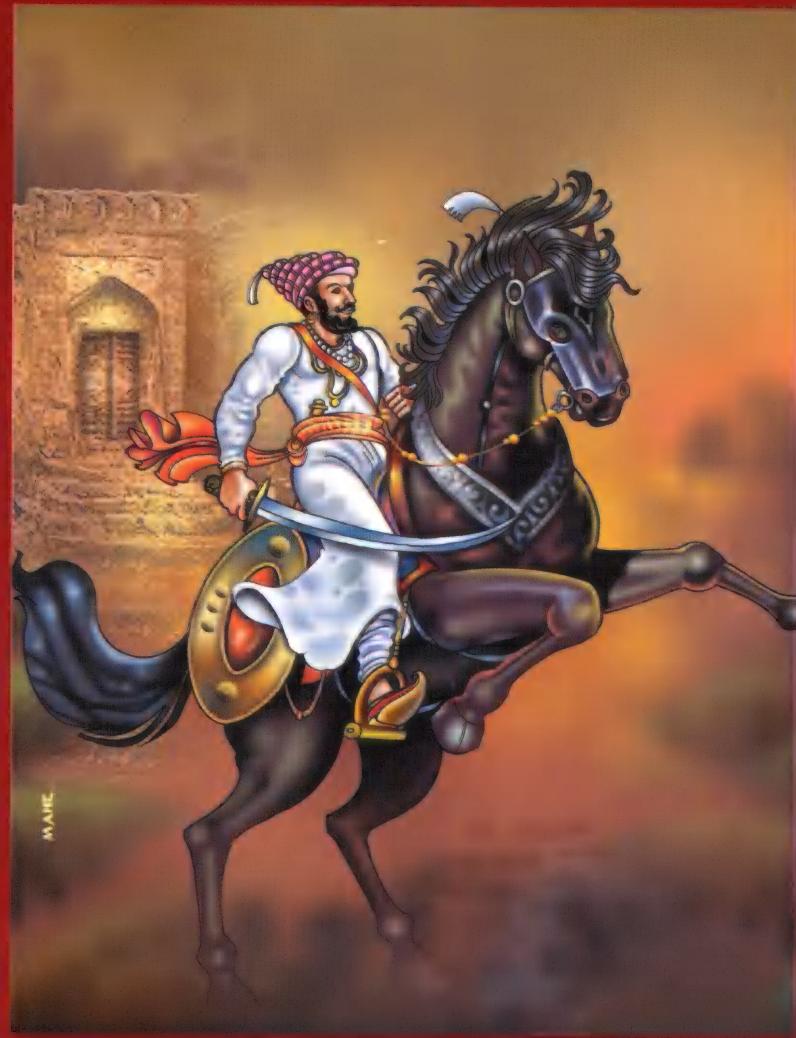
2003

Gandhi Ayya (Gandhi)



2006

P. Mahesh (Mahe)



2007



CHANDAMAMA





About Chandamama



Chandamama, conceptualised by legendary filmmakers Shri B. Nagi Reddi and his friend Shri Chakrapani, was launched in 1947. The two envisioned the magazine as a medium to familiarise the post-Independence generation with Indian tradition, folklore, mythology and history through stories. The magazine has survived many ups and downs over the years and successfully completes its 60th year. It was acquired by Mumbai-based Geodesic in 2007. Rich content and complementary illustrations have marked the growth of the magazine over the years. Now, in its new avatar as a corporate entity, Chandamama Limited is expanding into related areas including online (www.chandamama.com) and films and video production with its bank of over 15,000 exclusive stories. Interactive books and CDs are also part of Chandamama's efforts to reach out, educate and entertain today's young minds.

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